



Managing Anxiety in Children

February 2023



A child whose behavior
pushes you away is a
child who needs
connection before
anything else.

-Kelly Bartlett
Encouraging Words for Kids

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How are we all feeling?

- ▶ If you are happy to, please talk about how you are feeling today, being here?
- ▶ Put yourself in your child's shoes.





"When our
little people are
overwhelmed
by BIG emotions
it's our job to
share our calm,
not join
their chaos."

L.R. Kost

Behaviour

- ▶ Behaviour is always telling us something. Young children cannot articulate how they are feeling and often do not understand how or why they are feeling in a certain way.
- ▶ It is our job as adults to try and find out why.
- ▶ IT IS NOT EASY





Anxiety

- ▶ [Anxiety](#) is when you feel scared or nervous about a situation. It's a natural response that helps you react appropriately. If you have an [anxiety disorder](#), you're more likely to feel threatened by nonthreatening stressors.
- ▶ This could then spark an exaggerated stress response to daily activities, like riding the bus or sitting in traffic.



Alarm bells

- ▶ We all experience feelings of panic, anxiety or stress at times
- ▶ We all have an alarm bell in our head, like a fire alarm, to keep us safe in emergencies. It is called the amygdala (in our brain). When we are in danger it sends off a loud signal to our body.
- ▶ Being able to spot these feelings and the effects that they have on your body is the key to making them much easier to cope with
- ▶ Reference: 'Help! I've got an Alarm Bell going off in my Head' K.L Aspden
- ▶ It will help if children understand about their brain.

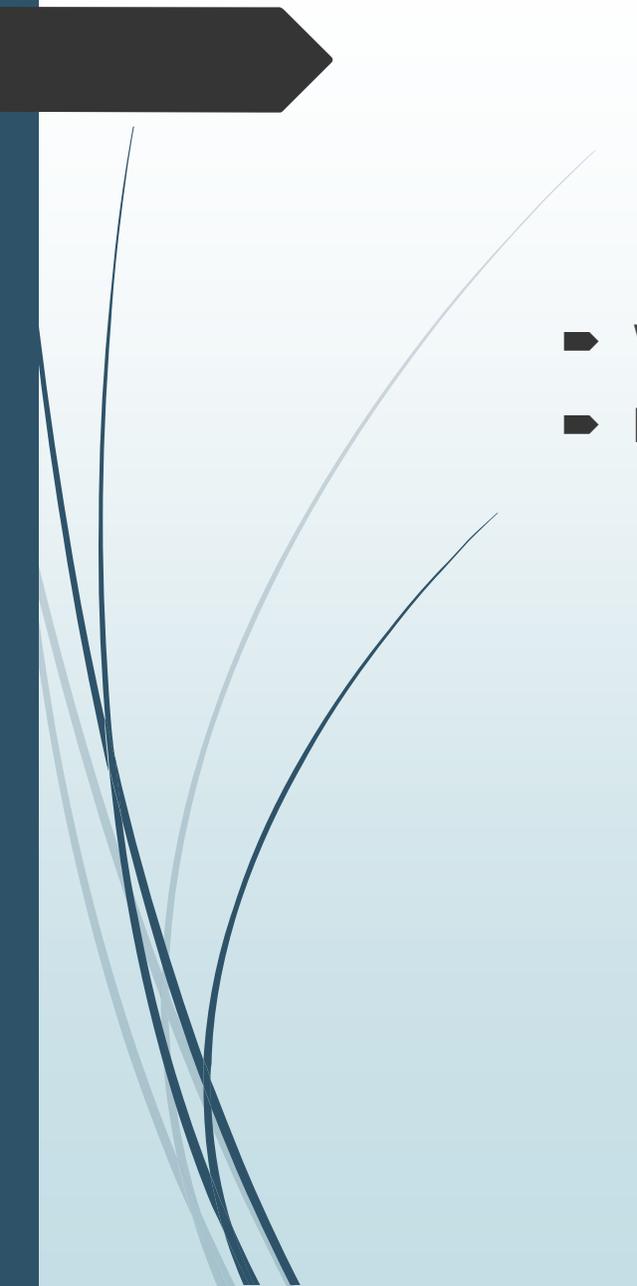
If your alarm goes off then you will
Fight, Flight or Freeze.





Fight, flight, freeze

- ▶ These are the body's natural reactions to danger. Different people may react differently to the same things e.g. spider in the house.
- ▶ Freezing is fight-or-flight on hold, where you further prepare to protect yourself. It involves similar physiological changes, but instead, you stay completely still and get ready for the next move.
- ▶ Fight-flight-freeze isn't a conscious decision. It's an automatic reaction, so you can't control it.

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Early Warning Signs

- ▶ What are your early warning signs?
- ▶ List/draw on Gingerbread man.



Physiological changes to the body – may experience some or all of the below

- **Heart rate.** Your heart beats faster to bring oxygen to your major muscles. During freezing, your [heart rate](#) might increase or decrease.
- **Lungs.** Your breathing speeds up to deliver more oxygen to your blood. In the freeze response, you might hold your breath or restrict breathing.
- **Eyes.** Your peripheral vision increases so you can notice your surroundings. Your [pupils dilate](#) and let in more light, which helps you see better.
- **Ears.** Your ears “perk up” and your hearing becomes sharper.
- **Blood.** Blood thickens, which increases clotting factors. This prepares your body for injury.
- **Skin.** Your skin might produce more sweat or get cold. You may look pale or have [goosebumps](#).
- **Hands and feet.** As blood flow increases to your major muscles, your hands and feet might get cold.
- **Pain perception.** Fight-or-flight temporarily reduces your perception of pain.
- Your specific physiological reactions depend on how you usually respond to stress. You might also shift between fight-or-flight and freezing, but this is very difficult to control.
- Usually, your body will return to its natural state after 20 to 30 minutes

Triggers and Buttons

- ▶ The situations that cause our alarm to go off are triggers and buttons.
- ▶ We all have triggers and buttons.

- ▶ What pushes your buttons?



- ▶ What pushes a child's buttons?
- ▶ Everyone has different triggers and buttons and we need to be aware that we are all different.



Inside triggers and outside triggers

- These can make us feel like we are in danger even if we are not.

Outside triggers

Something that happens like an unexpected loud noise, a thunder storm, someone calling you names even a smell.

Inside triggers

Could be a feeling you have in your body or a thought you have in your mind. This can be just as scary but harder to notice.

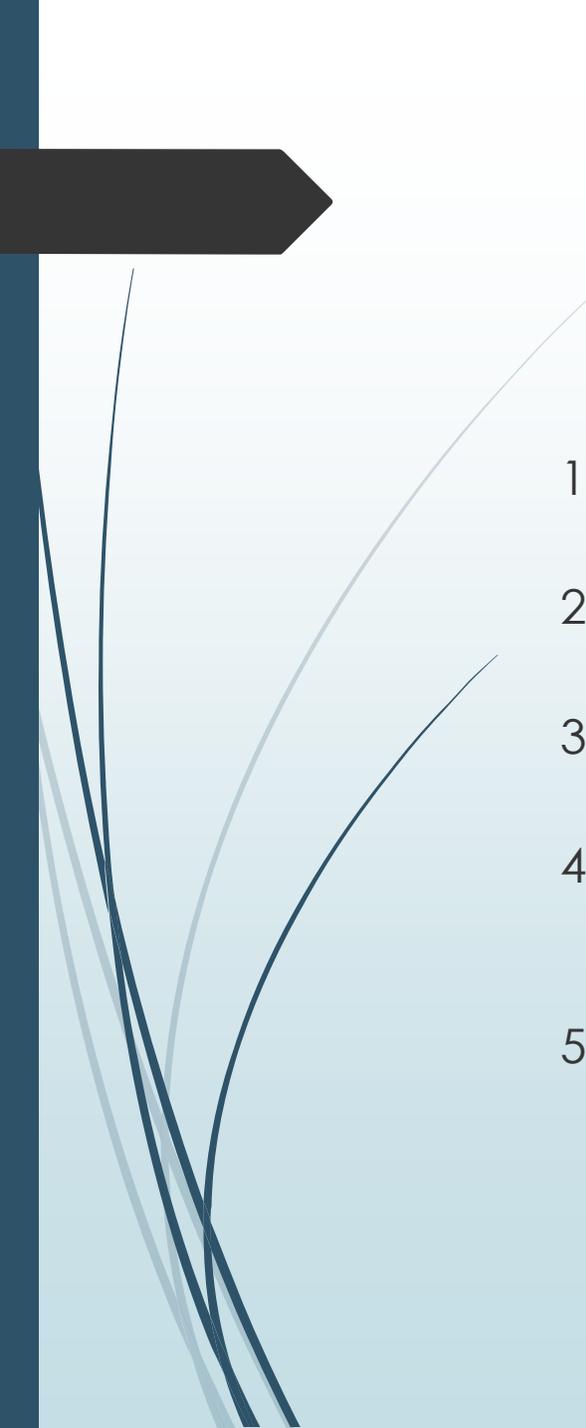
Our body holds memories about everything, even the things we can't remember.

If we have had a lot of danger around us then our body will always be on red alert, waiting for the next bad thing to happen.

Switching Off

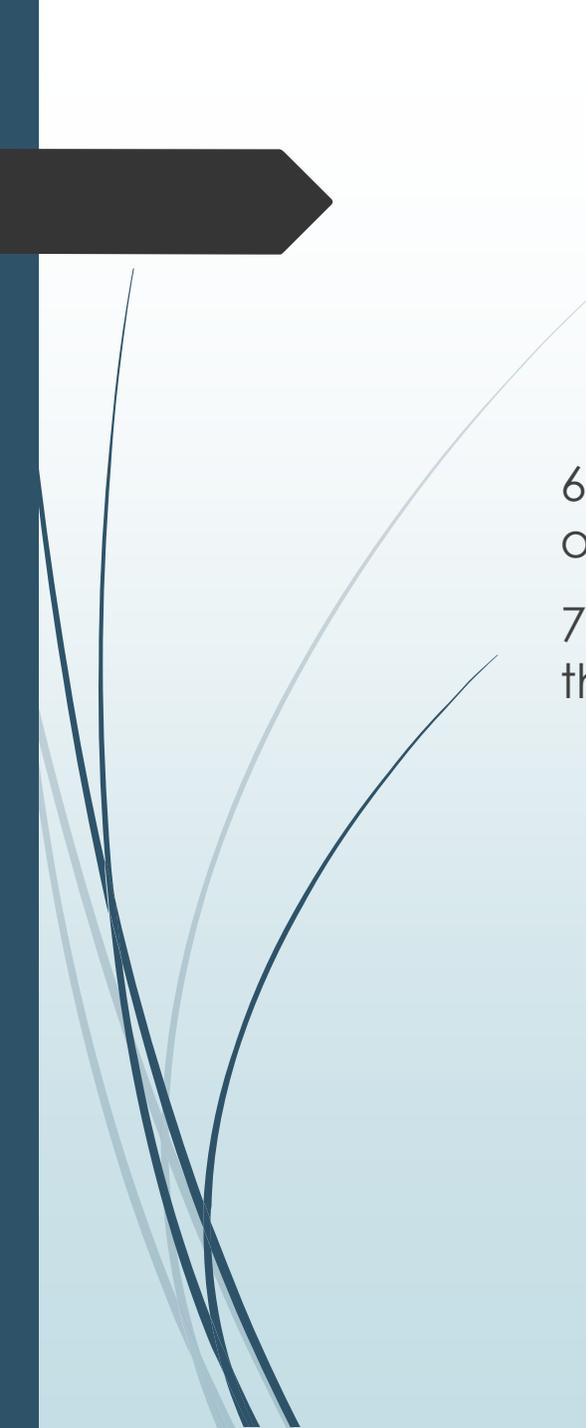
- ▶ Good news! – We can learn to switch off the alarm. There are lots of simple ideas about how to do this but they are not necessarily easy! It is like training a lively dog.
- ▶ It takes a dog time to learn new tricks.
- ▶ It needs lots of practise.
- ▶ We may need support from a friend, parent, adult In school.





Switching your alarm off. 7 Step Plan

1. False alarm – Get the facts. Is this a real threat? Some children may need a sensory object in pocket to help them calm down.
2. Breathe – Find a breathing technique. Breathe ‘round your hand’, breathe with an expanding ball, breathe round a shape (a rectangle or a star).
3. Distraction – e.g. count things around the room, find something that is blue, find something beginning with ..., give the child a quick job to do.
4. Grounding – To bring the child back. E.g. rub hands together, squeeze hands together and let go, push up against a wall, touch things that are soft and hard, run hands under cold then hot tap.
5. Come back to now – Noticing what is around you. Look at a picture in great detail, stroke hands gently, feel your jumper, notice the temperature of your hands.

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6. Visualisation – (concentrate on something) , Think of a peaceful place, think of a good memory, think of your pet, listen to a relaxing piece of music.
 7. Talk to Someone – when appropriate. This can be calming for a child when they are in the right frame of mind.

Feelings are Feelings

- ▶ Think – ‘What is this feeling trying to tell me?’
- ▶ Read/Listen to ‘Don’t feed the Worry Bug’ by Andi Green.
- ▶ The worry worm game. Write worries on worms and hide around the room. Find and read out. It is important for children to know that adults have worries too.



- ▶ Worry dolls



'Children's emotions are as real as yours.
Just because they might get sad over the
colour of their cup, does not make their
feelings any less real.'

~ Rebekah Lipp



Anxiety Grounding Techniques

Grounding Exercise

*For use during a panic attack,
when you need to stay calm,
or anytime you feel "disconnected" from your body.*

Look around you. Identify + name:

- 5 things you **see**
- 4 things you **feel**
- 3 things you **hear**
- 2 things you **smell**
- 1 thing you **taste**

puzzlepeacecounseling.com

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Feelings Scales

- ▶ There are lots of different ways of doing this. Could be done relating to stories i.e. Little Red Riding Hood – how did LRRH feel at beginning, middle and end of story? It gives the children the language of feelings and emotions.
- ▶ Find one that suits you, your child.

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Social Stories

These are a good way to help children deal with changes or things that may happen that they have to learn to cope with.

► They must be:

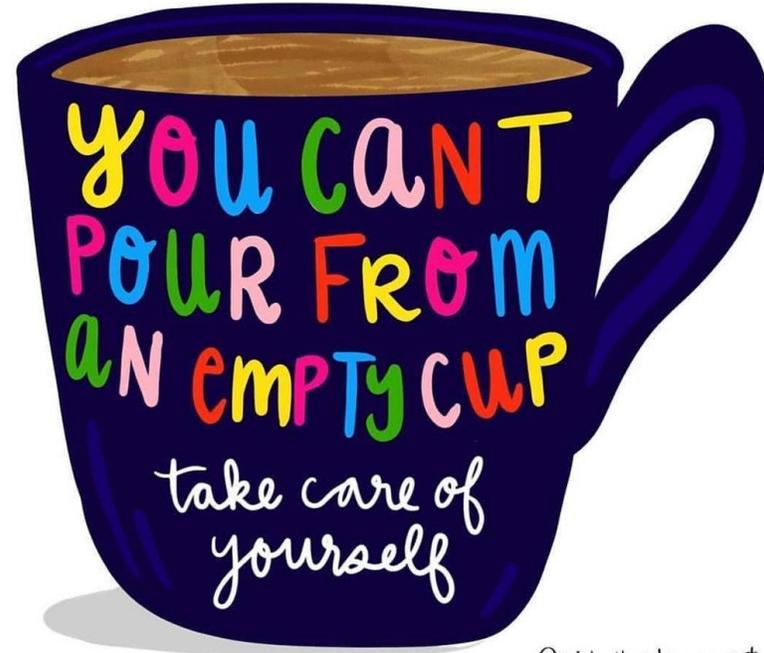
In first person

Positive

Brief and concise

Clear

Have picture cues



@michellesolomonart

Remember...

- One of my favourite quotes....

