



What's Next? Series
The Child Who Is Anxious

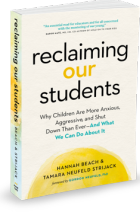

Catherine Korah
 Behaviour Consultant
 CEBM Coordinator

January 19th, 2023





Book chapter and webinar on Anxiety and Alarm

8
 The Child Who Is Anxious

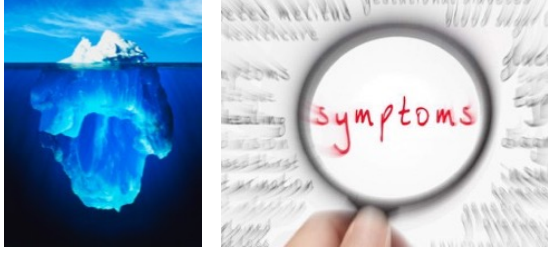



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCJMT2iTPt4&t=705s>

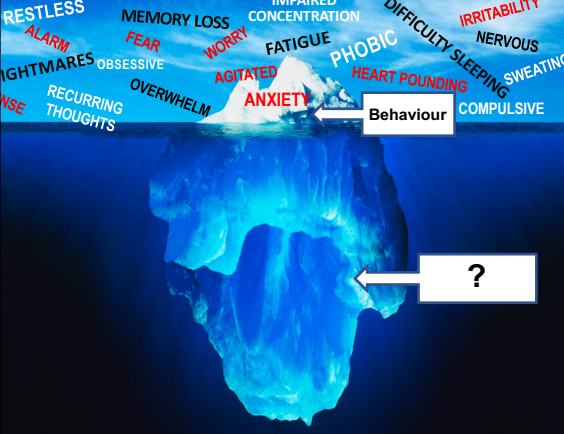


Start with the WHY
 Simon Sinek - Golden Circle

WHY: the purpose
 what is your cause?
 what do you see?



KEY INSIGHT #1 Children's behavior isn't always what it seems, we need to dig deeper and look at what's happening beneath.



Behaviour

?

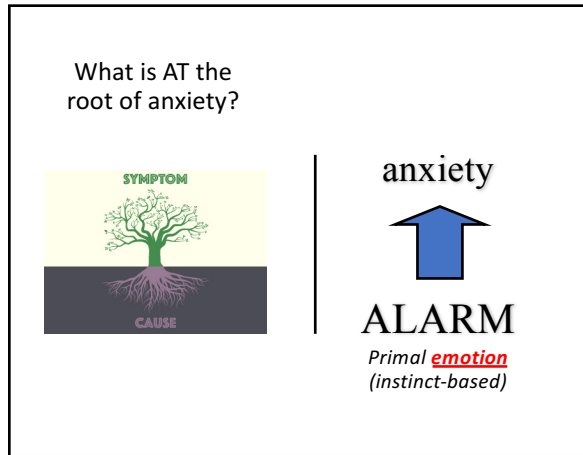
SHIFTING OUR LENS
 To gain perspective and insight



What we SEE influences what we do

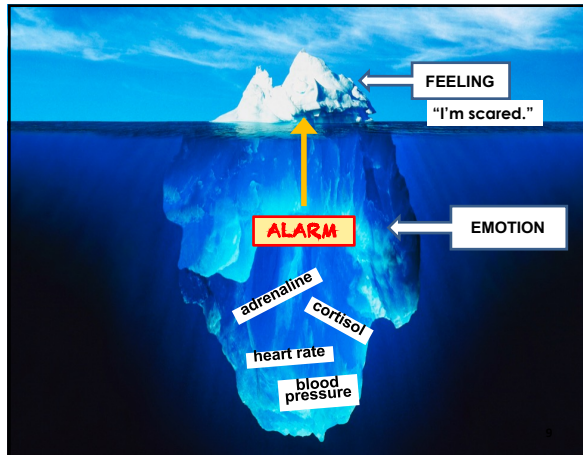
When we understand what is behind the behaviour we then:

- choose interventions that will make a difference
- avoid interventions that risk making things worse



What is the difference between?

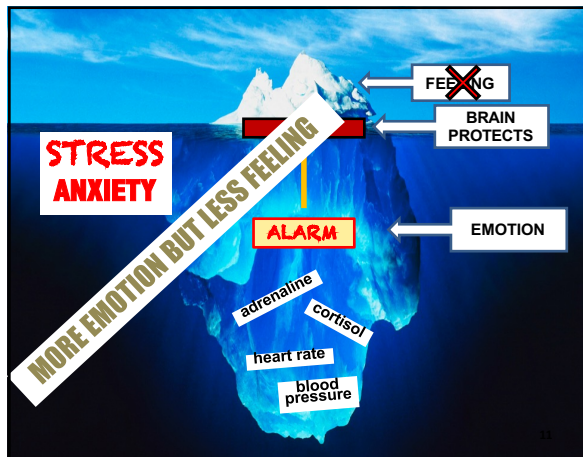
- **ALARM:** instinctive primal emotion in response to a danger or threat
- **ANXIETY:** a vague sense of unsafety and unease, characterized by apprehension and restlessness



Where does **anxiety** come from?

BRAIN'S ALARM SYSTEM:

- Mediated by the **LIMBIC SYSTEM**
- **Amygdala** registers the threat (like a smoke detector)
- **Hypothalamus** orchestrates the response (it links the nervous system to the endocrine system via the pituitary gland)
- Which triggers the **SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**



ANXIETY-BASED PROBLEMS

- Not feeling safe
- Anxiety reducing behaviours
- Ruminating thoughts
- Difficulty learning
- Nightmares
- Scattered attention
- Agitation
- Tension/ hyperness
- Poor memory
- Fatigue
- Phobias
- Obsessions
- Compulsions
- Panic attacks
- Acting out
- Controlling
- Etc.

FEELING

EMOTION

ALARM

adrenaline
cortisol
heart rate
blood pressure

Key insights

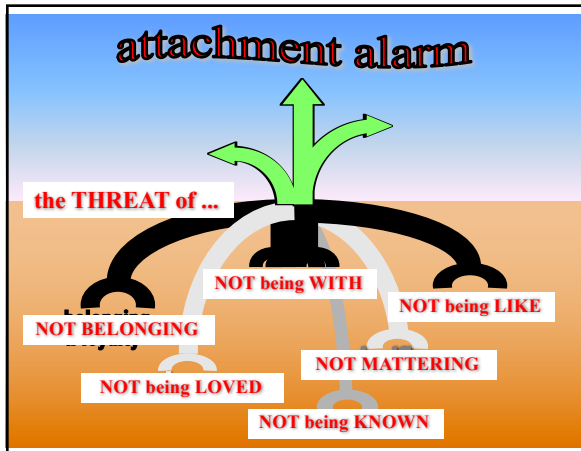
- We all experience alarm on some level. Not only is it normal, but it is telling us something.
- Alarm is a natural and necessary emotion, which protects us from danger.
- Some individuals are more at-risk for developing anxiety problems.
- In a classroom, anxious students aren't necessarily disruptive or harmful to others.
- Certain behaviors don't appear to be anxiety-related, but in fact they are (e.g. inattentiveness, being silly, lashing out).
- We cannot address anxiety by focusing on the symptoms directly.

ATTACHMENT ALARM

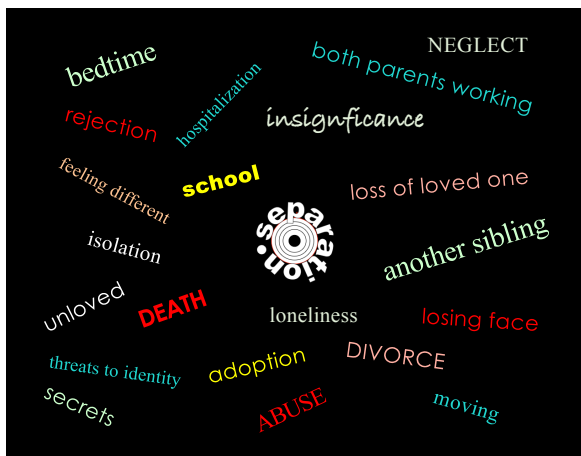
ATTACHMENT = SURVIVAL

Attachment is people's most preeminent need, but also their biggest threat.

The impact of separation is more studied in research than any other single phenomenon (e.g. isolation research across species, human loneliness research, analysis of different population groups suffering loss and lack, longitudinal studies, etc.)

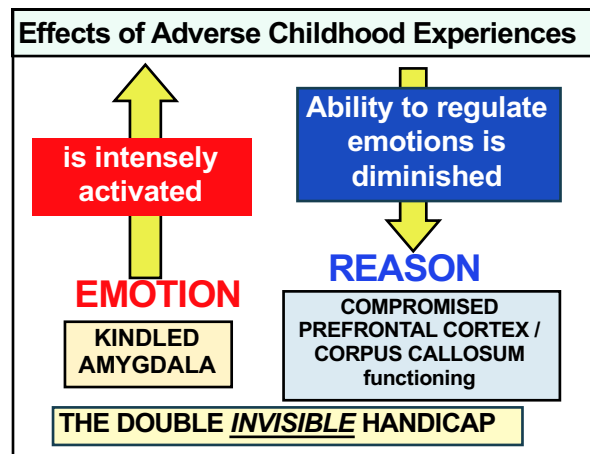
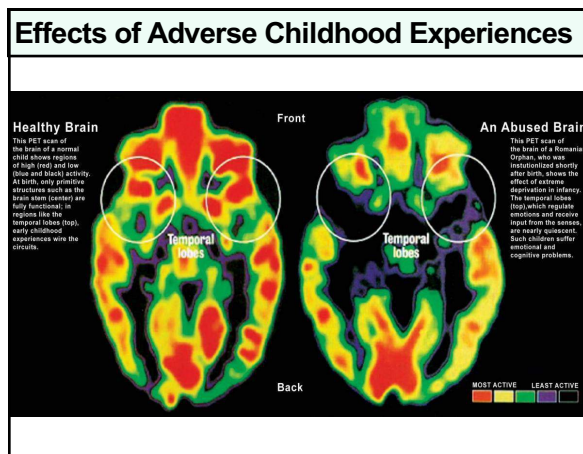
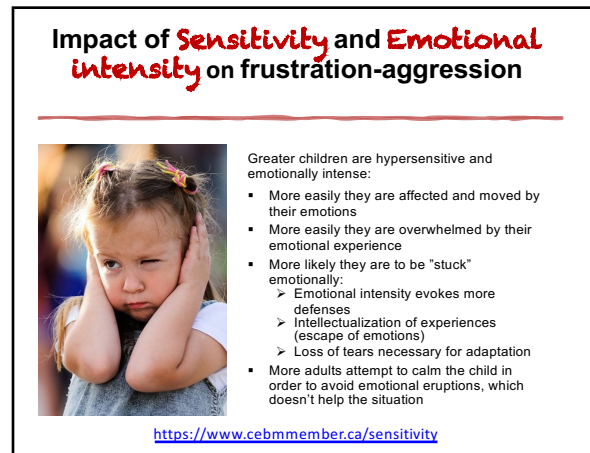
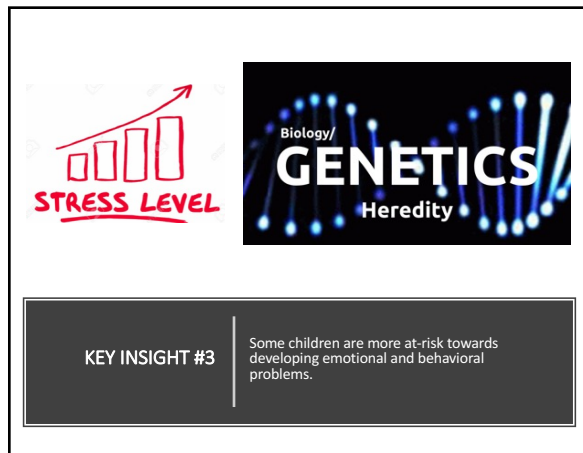
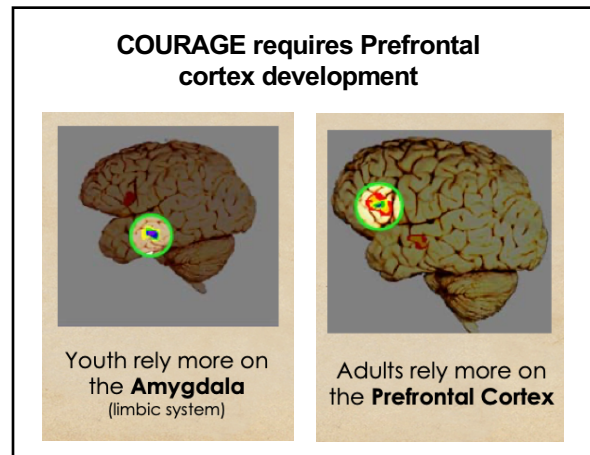


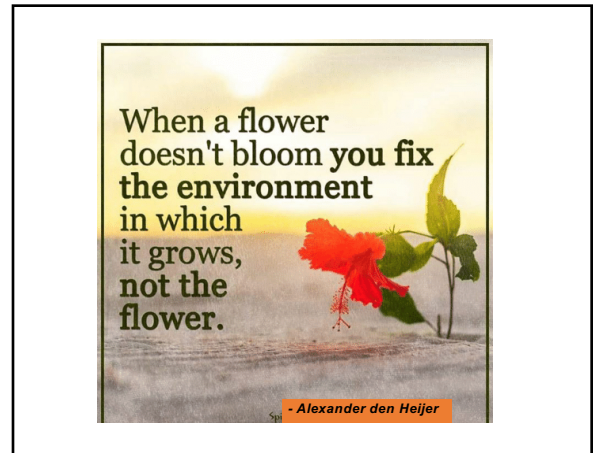
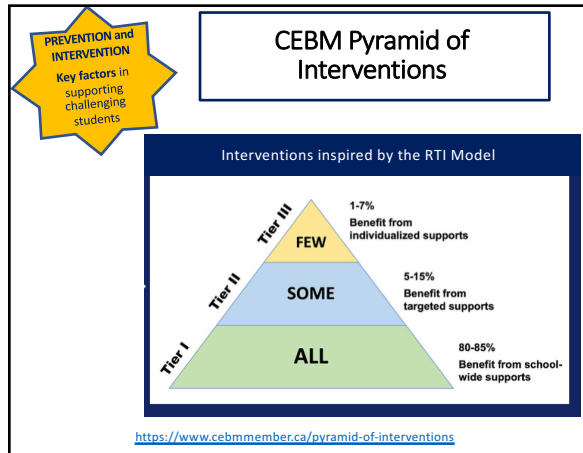
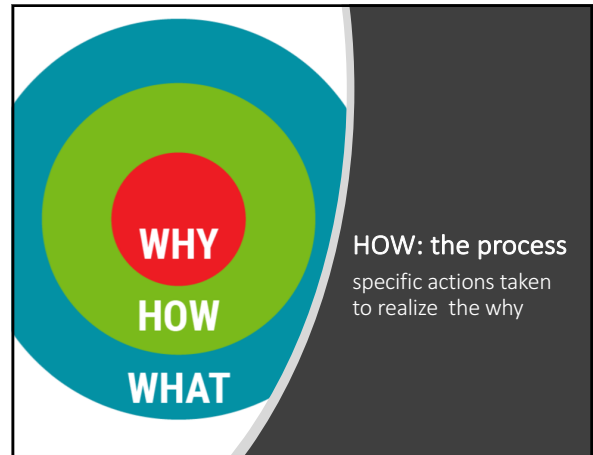
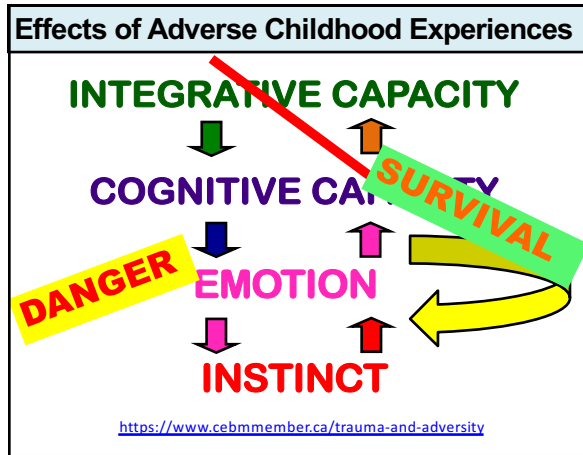
ATTACHMENT THREAT	ALARMING FEELING
Not being with	I'm alone, nobody is paying attention to be, no one wants to be with me, I feel rejected, etc.
Not being like	I'm different, I have nothing in common, I'm not normal, I feel prejudice against me, etc.
Not belonging	I don't feel included, Nobody is taking my side, no one has my back, people are against me, etc.
Not mattering	I don't feel noticed or listened to, I don't feel useful or important, people don't respect me, I don't feel esteemed or admired, my opinion doesn't count, my role doesn't matter, etc.
Not being loved	I don't feel taken care of, I don't feel warmth from anyone, I feel unlovable, etc.
Not being known	I don't feel truly seen or heard, I don't feel understood, I cannot share my secrets, I cannot truly be myself, etc.






KEY INSIGHT #2 | Children's behavior is based on development and emotional maturity. We cannot push and pull to get what's expected.





BEST PRACTICES
 Gaining insight to inform practice

From: What's wrong with you? This behaviour has to stop.

To: He's experiencing too much **alarm** – too much is overwhelming in his life.

How can I help to release and reduce the stress?

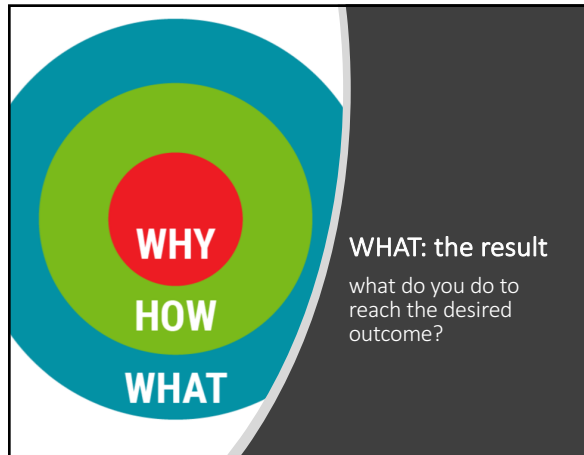
BEHAVIOUR CHANGES WHEN...

Maturation
 Behaviour changes as the brain matures

Emotions
 Behaviour changes when emotions are felt

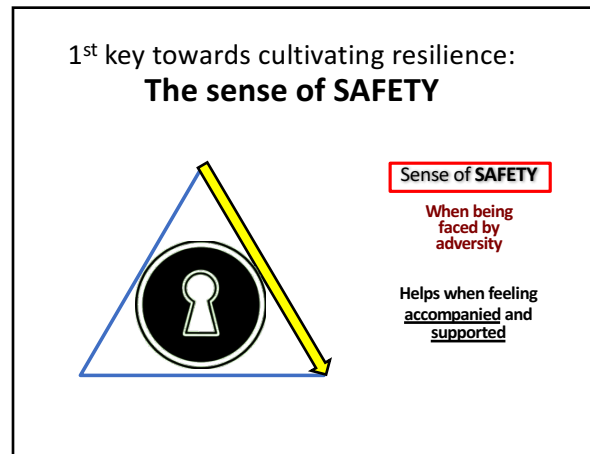
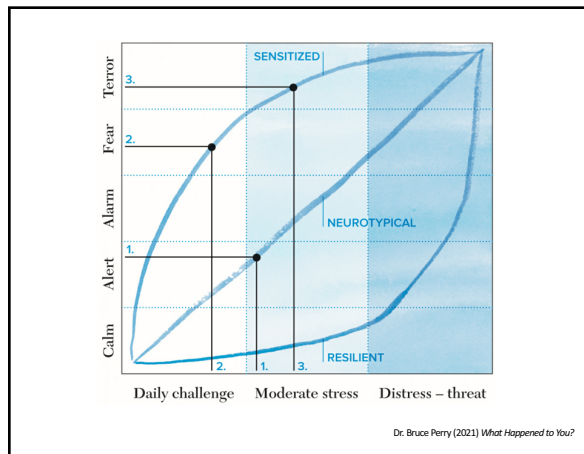
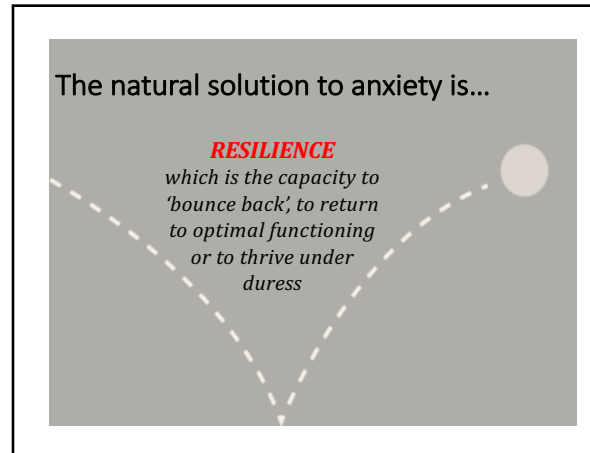
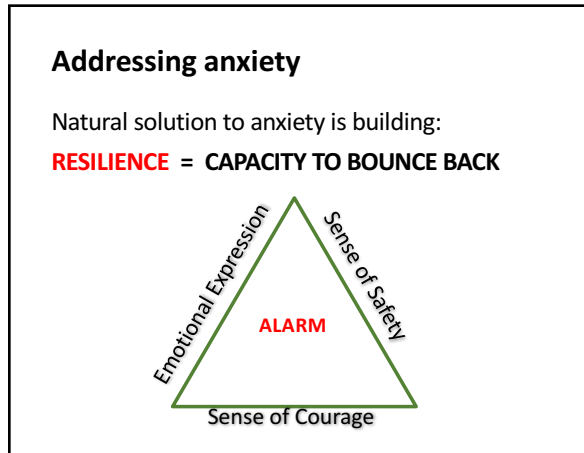
Vulnerability
 Behaviour changes when vulnerability is protected

Attachment
 Behaviour changes when students are attached to adults



Challenge: Anxiety & Alarm			
Making Sense of What is Unfolding and Mapping Interventions to Support a Student			
What are the behaviors that you see?	Suggested Interventions	Understanding "WHY?" this might be the underlying cause	Practices to AVOID and what to do
<p>In the Classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wants to keep personal belongings with them as joining them in their locker Struggles to come into the classroom Does not give eye contact when greeting In their "lean bubble," seek to be covered, feel others are "looking at them" Struggles to attend to tasks and to retain Struggles to attend to tasks and to retain Does not "lean in" to peers looking at them from a distance Checks on objects, clothes, bike lock Struggles to follow daily routine - uncertain Struggles to respond promptly to reassurance Struggles to begin and complete academic tasks Becomes overwhelmed when asked to do multiple tasks Shuts down in the face of uncertainty Has emotional outbursts in the face of uncertainty Fatigues easily Flat affect/hypofrontality Reacts to small unrelated areas Gets out of the room when triggered Feels insecure when substitute teachers are present <p>In the School/On the Playground:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refuses to leave the classroom for other subjects or to go outside or walk Refuses to go outside for recess When away from their classroom or recess, will flee back to their "safe place" or other (usually the same place) Makes alone, doesn't join into games with peers Struggles easily when surrounded with different stimuli or in proximity 	<p>Tiers 1 & 2 practices: In the Classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on meaningful, significant assignments with the student - increase opportunities to make 1:1 connections Establish and follow structured routines - predictability helps them feel safe and know what is expected of them Use visual aids/visuals - this provides security and predictability Allow them to show physical proximity to the adult - helps to reassure and increase security Clearly structure experience vs. perceptual photo album, soft music, light of choice, dim lighting, something to focus on When doing groupwork, assign roles that are great to surround them with students who will support them Breakdown tasks into manageable steps - name your belief in them, "that they can do this" Allow additional time to process teacher requests Provide support at all intervals to require and/or direct Notice, name and recognize effort - focus on small steps Have a "helper area" and/or "quiet area" near the classroom Organize a Personal Box with the student - include items they enjoy, looking, looking at and doing when they need a break, include a "recovery activity" Change items periodically to maintain engagement Provide a journal to use a journal with the teacher, this provides a critical direct connection with the adult and self Establish a "Caring Area" where student can retreat to Match the student to the adults who are caring for them - build a village of attachments Bring an experience from one time of connection to the next Consider alternate arrangements when substitute teacher is present. <p>Tiers 2 & 3 practices In the School/On the Playground:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide student with passes to visit the Technician Room, to work, to talk, to help Have targeted intervention materials available for use in Technician Room Participate in "recess" during recess and lunchtime, this will help them anticipate what they will be doing Participation in "recess" with adult supervision - generally easier for them to engage being in small group than large group in open areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child may name that they are "anxious, worried, but not know why" Facing too much separation from caregivers - attachments may not be deep enough for them to feel secure More parental and struggles to move forward with their day Admitted and overwhelmed with school experience - too much to keep up or being asked of them. Lack of role or attachments with adults in the classroom Irregularity in emotional development due to age Irregularity in emotional development due to emotional background Learning difficulties Disorganized conditions Hyperactivity, hyperresponsivity Sensory issues, ASD <p>For more details please see: https://www.cebmmember.ca/frustration-and-aggression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative charts, rewards and behavior contracts Focus on charts, rewards rather than their good intentions and efforts May increase management Show the relationship contingent on performance Time-outs, increase separation from classroom If using the agency to repair behavior, be sensitive, fight with positive, change and calm ongoing efforts

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/frustration-and-aggression>



Sense of SAFETY

How can we help a student feel SAFE enough when faced with stressful and wounding situations?

- Through the presence of a warm and trusting adult, which allows the teen to experience some **EMOTIONAL REST**
- Through the experience of well-being in a safe place
- Through the experience of safety when pretending/imagining to face something stressful or dangerous (emotions at play)

SAFETY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Not whether we (adults) think that the child is in a safe place or whether we believe the child should be feeling safe, but rather it's the child's own subjective experience and interpretation (feeling "Brain-Safe")

Emotional SAFETY means...

- Staying keen: showing delight and warmth
- Meeting them at their interests. Being actively engaged in their lives where you can (beyond academics)
- Using structure – routine – predictability
- **BOUNDARIES & LIMITS** – focusing on needs, not wants
- Letting them share their thoughts and feelings about their anxiety. We don't need to be in the 'fix-it' mode.



"You've Got Mail" Transition with a Destination

"You've Got Mail" letters provide something tangible for a student to hold as they head to a pre-determined destination for a short period of time.

Two types of letters are available:

- Active movement
- Quiet activity

<https://www.cebmmember.ca/practices-outside-the-classroom>

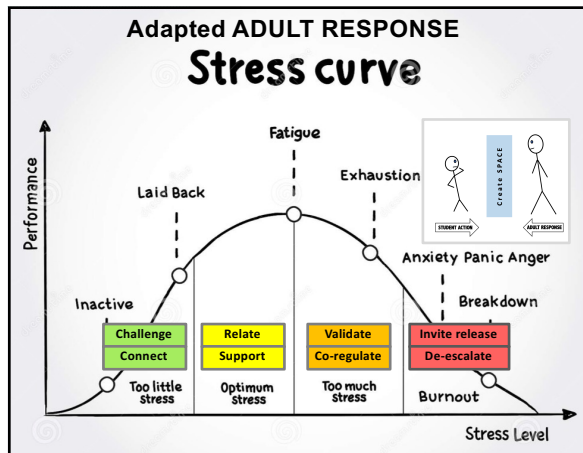
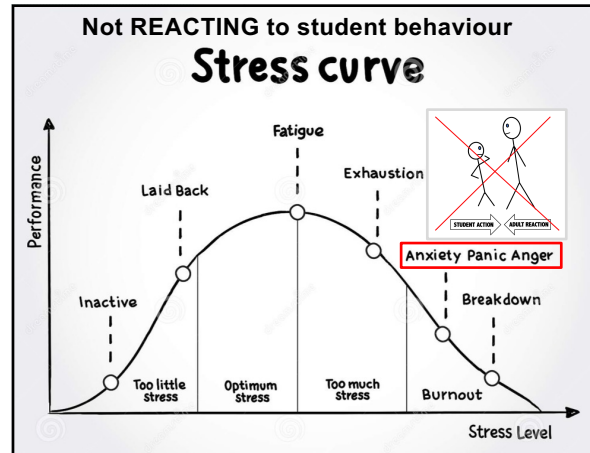




Nurturing Support Centre
Tier 3 Intervention

Personalized & adapted schedule

Individualized support




2nd key towards cultivating resilience:

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Recognizing one's **FRUSTRATION**
Sense of **SADNESS**

When things don't work

Helps when being invited to express and feeling comforted




“When kids have big feelings, they are trying to communicate that something isn't right.”

—April Brown



The benefits of VENTING



Sometimes, all we need is to let it out.

Emotional expression

How can we provide opportunities for emotional expression when a student is up against that which one cannot change?

- Through adult warmth and comfort
- Through inviting children to express and name their feelings
- Through emotional playgrounds that are one-step-removed from the situation

THE PROBLEM WITH "RIGHT" THINKING

- focusing just on being positive
- pursuing happiness
- resisting the 'let-down'
- pursuing calmness & tranquility

To come alongside a person's feelings is to...

- accept their existence regardless of how irrational and unreasonable they may seem;
- normalize the feelings rather than treat their existence as a problem;
- Make room for the feelings rather than try to get rid of them.

Emotions AT PLAY

Here are a few examples of outlets that help teens stay engaged on their emotional journey:

- Dancing and movement
- Stories and writing
- Drawing and painting
- Singing and music
- Drama and theatre
- Any hobby
- Etc.

PLAY and RESILIENCE

PLAY AS A NEURAL EXERCISE

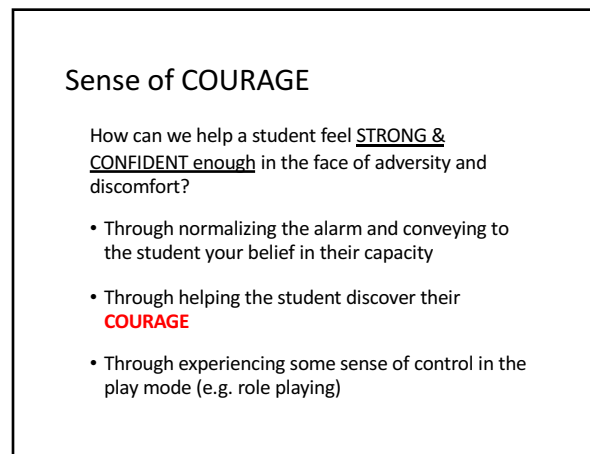
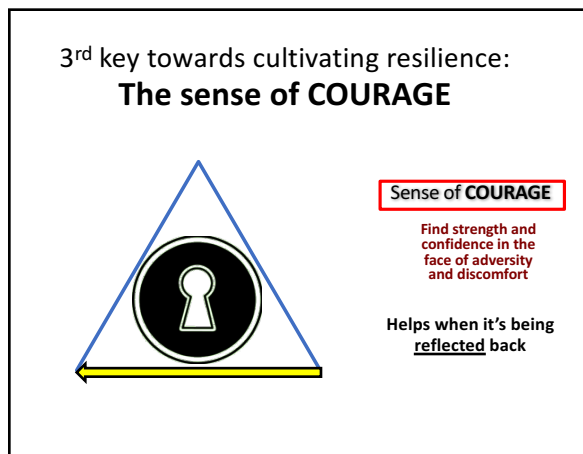
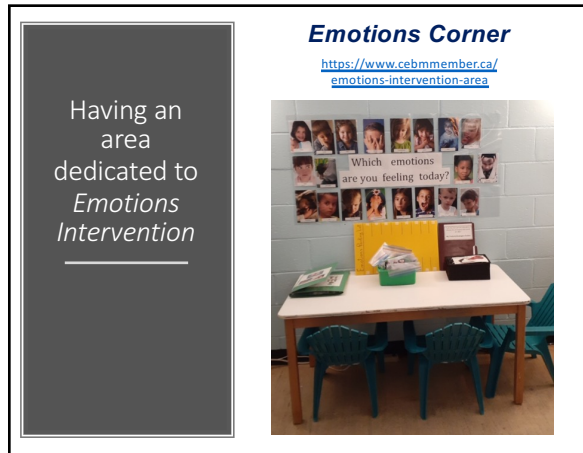
Dr. Porges describes play as a "neural exercise" healing behavioral and emotional dysregulation.

It's a neural exercise in that it flexes the "muscle" of emotional regulation through reciprocal interactions under conditions of safety with others.

Stephen Porges, The Polyvagal Theory, 2011

Classroom Emotional Release Activities


<https://www.cebmmember.ca/emotions-intervention-area>



ACCOMPANYING with empathy

- Typical examples that dismiss and invalidate:
 - ✓ Don't be silly
 - ✓ There's nothing to be scared of
 - ✓ You see, everything turned out fine, all that worrying for nothing
- Empathic acknowledgements:
 - ✓ Wow, that was really scary
 - ✓ Everyone gets scared at times, even grown-ups. I do too!
 - ✓ Even though everything worked out, I know you were really worried

Pseudo-resilience



ALARM

- to be away from home
- to be laughed at
- to appear stupid
- to lose popularity
- to be seen as different
- to not be interesting
- to meet disapproval
- to have to let go
- to not measure up
- to be alone

Being anxious pushes towards **AVOIDANCE**

- Running away from
- Hiding from
- Not trying
- Not taking risks

The natural solution to avoidance is **COURAGE**

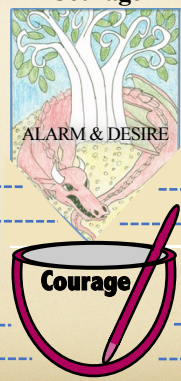
COURAGE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF FEAR:

Courage is about focusing on your **desire** to give you the strength to face your fear.

DESIRE

- to engage in an activity
- to take part in some fun
- to ask one's question
- to stand up for a friend
- to wear what one prefers
- to share one's story
- to express one's opinion
- to get attached & involved
- to pursue a passion
- to be oneself

Cultivating Courage



<h4>DESIRE</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to engage in an activity to take part in some fun to ask one's question to stand up for a friend to wear what one prefers to share one's story to express one's opinion to get attached & involved to pursue a passion to be oneself 	<h4>ALARM</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to be away from home to be laughed at to appear stupid to lose popularity to be seen as different to not be interesting to meet disapproval to have to let go to not measure up to be alone
---	---

Have a go

Playing with fears allows to experience courage and find one's strength



Our ROLE as the adult

teacher
Educator
Principal
COACH
Technician
Attendant
counsellor

Adjusting our VIEW

- Acknowledging emotions happen to us as opposed to under our control
- Understanding maturation as key to managing emotions

Adjusting our STANCE

- Not alarming them with our own alarm, frustration or disapproval
- Normalizing the experience of alarm and its energy to move us

Making ROOM for

- Emotions that come up
- Type of expression and release
...even for the uncomfortable stuff

Catherine Korah and Martine Demers
Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management
www.cebm.ca




THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT (CEBM)

As a support to the 10 English School Boards of Quebec, the CEBM aims to help boards and their staff to find effective and developmentally friendly interventions for working with students who experience significant behavioural challenges in the school setting.


Also visit the CEBM Resource Center
<https://www.cebmmember.ca/frustration-and-aggression>

Editorials on Alarm & Anxiety




May 20, 2016 - 10:11min

Helping the Anxious Child or Teen Find Rest
by Deborah MacNamara (May 20, 2016)




May 29, 2019 - 8:11min

The Emotional Roots of Anxiety: Healing Through Connection
by Deborah MacNamara (May 29th, 2019)



Mar 25, 2021 - 7:11min

Freedom of Expression: Guiding kids' emotions into maturity
by Deborah MacNamara (March 25th, 2021)




Apr 26, 2021 - 4:11min

Playing with Alarm
by Lisa Weiszer (April 26, 2021)

<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/helping-the-anxious-child-or-teen-find-rest/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/the-emotional-roots-of-anxiety/>
<https://macnamara.ca/portfolio/freedom-of-expression-guiding-kids-emotions-into-maturity/>
<https://neufeldinstitute.org/playing-with-alarm/>

Upcoming Events



<https://www.cebm.ca/news-events>

Wed, Feb 15 | Online Professional Development...

What's Next? series: The Child Who Is Bossy

Join us ONLINE Wednesday, February 15th, 2023 - 4:00-5:00 pm. Presenter: Catherine Korah. Event is FREE. The session will be recorded and available on the CEBM website.

[To Register](#)

Tue, Mar 28 | Online Professional Development

Teen Anxiety and Resilience

Join us ONLINE Tuesday, March 28th, 2023 - 4:00-5:00 pm. Presenter: Catherine Korah. Event is FREE. The session will be recorded and available on the CEBM website.

[To Register](#)