

Supporting your Child's Emotional Regulation and Mental Health

Fortismere school
Karen Hodes, Specialist Senior Practitioner
Haringey Educational Psychology Service
July 2020

Aims

- What to expect in terms of your child's emotional needs – the impact of Covid 19
- The transition of going back to school
- Sleep
- Bereavement
- Motivation
- Understanding anxiety and what happens to the brain and body when we're stressed
- Tips on how to help manage anxiety and regulate emotions and behaviour

The impact of Covid 19

- Situation of Covid 19: experience is different for everyone
- The message from society around us - 'danger'
- Teenagers: the structure of the brain changes dramatically – not just hormones
- But, young people are naturally resilient

The Teenage Brain

SENSE OF SELF DEVELOPS: Sense of self goes through a huge transformation, high value on others judgements and therefore very self-conscious

STRONG PEER INFLUENCE: More than family

EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPS: Ability to integrate perspectives and intentions of others and interpretations of emotions

MORE INFLUENCED BY REWARDS: Especially immediate rewards, dopamine peaks are common which relates to impulse control and can lead to poor decisions

SOCIAL JUSTICE IS IMPORTANT: Values and being socially conscious motivates teens, possible links with passion and unfairness

MORE PASSION AND CREATIVITY: Novel and original thinking (experimental evidence)

PLANNING: Not fully developed (links with executive functioning)

Managing the transition of back to school

- Talk to them about what might be different when they return
- Be clear about why it is a positive for them to return to school
- Make time to talk through their anxieties
- Manage your expectations: they will need time to adapt
- Be honest about the situation but reassure everything is being done to keep them safe

Managing the transition of going back to school: sleep

- Adolescent sleep is different – body clock shifts
- Need around 8.5-9 hours sleep per night
- Sleep hormone ‘melatonin’: no screens an hour before bed; exposure to daylight; low lights; bath
- Bed-time routine – all ages
- Don’t suddenly change the bed-time
- Ideally move towards regular timings of your child’s bed-time and getting up the same (or at least within an hour) in the week and the weekends
- Regular meals
- Exercise but not too near to bed-time



Loss and Bereavement

- Grief is a normal adjustment process and most children/young people will recover without counselling – if feelings are overwhelming beyond a period of time, they may need additional help
- From 9 years onwards reactions become more adult-like
- Try to be empathic and acceptant of behaviour changes
- Creative activities
- They may be drawn to peers
- Talk to school about how they can support with the grieving process

Childbereavement.org.uk

Winstonwish.org.uk

[Educational Psychology guidance on bereavement](#)

Motivation

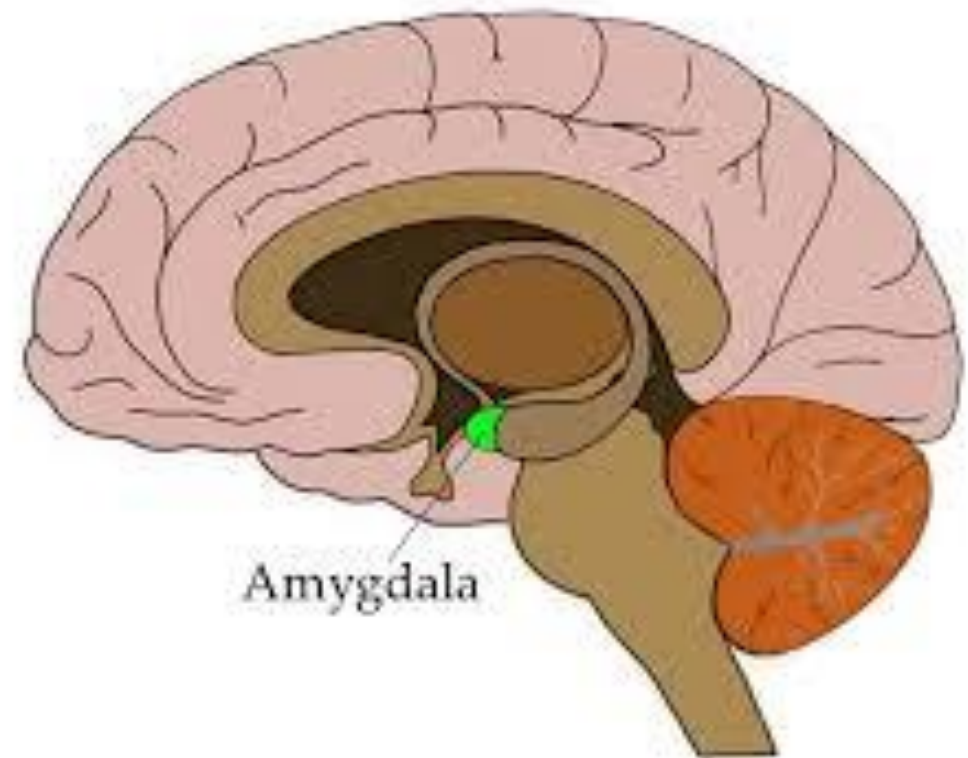
- Many children and young people have found it hard to concentrate and motivate themselves
- Manage expectations
- Acknowledge how hard it is and that you understand
- Support them with planning and time-tables

Understanding Anxiety

- Anxiety often manifests in physical symptoms in children/depression in young people
- Why do some young people worry more than others?
 - 1/3 from genes
 - 2/3 environmental: experiences, how adults react; observing others; and having limited opportunities to face fears and develop skills

What happens to the brain and body when we are anxious and stressed

- **Downstairs brain/reptile brain:** brain stem and limbic region surrounding amygdala: allows us to act before we think and make split survival decisions
- **Mammal brain/upstairs brain:** leads us toward connection and relationships and allows us to think before we act
- **fight, flight, freeze** - sympathetic nervous system
- **The vagus nerve contributes to the parasympathetic nervous system** - calms and slows the system down

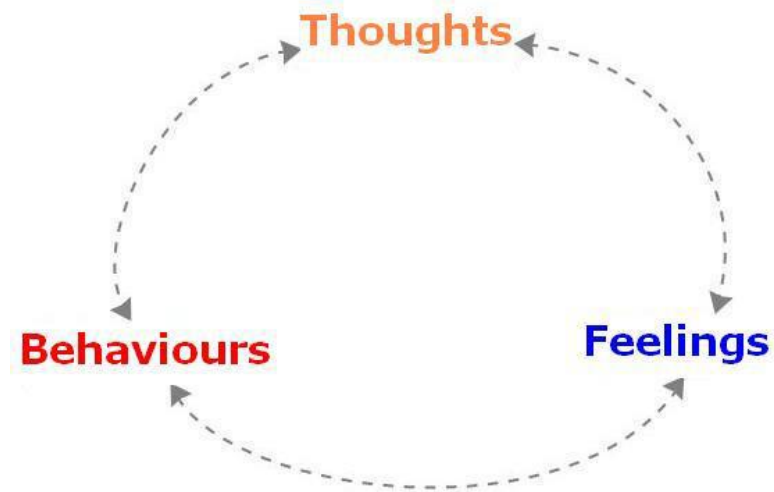


How can we help young people to feel less worried and to regulate their emotions?

- Look after yourself first
- Be kind to yourself, you're good enough
- If things are stressful, acknowledge your resilience in managing
- Containing your emotions and emotional responses as much as you are able to will help young people to contain theirs
- Be aware of your reactions and responses

Understanding anxiety and emotions

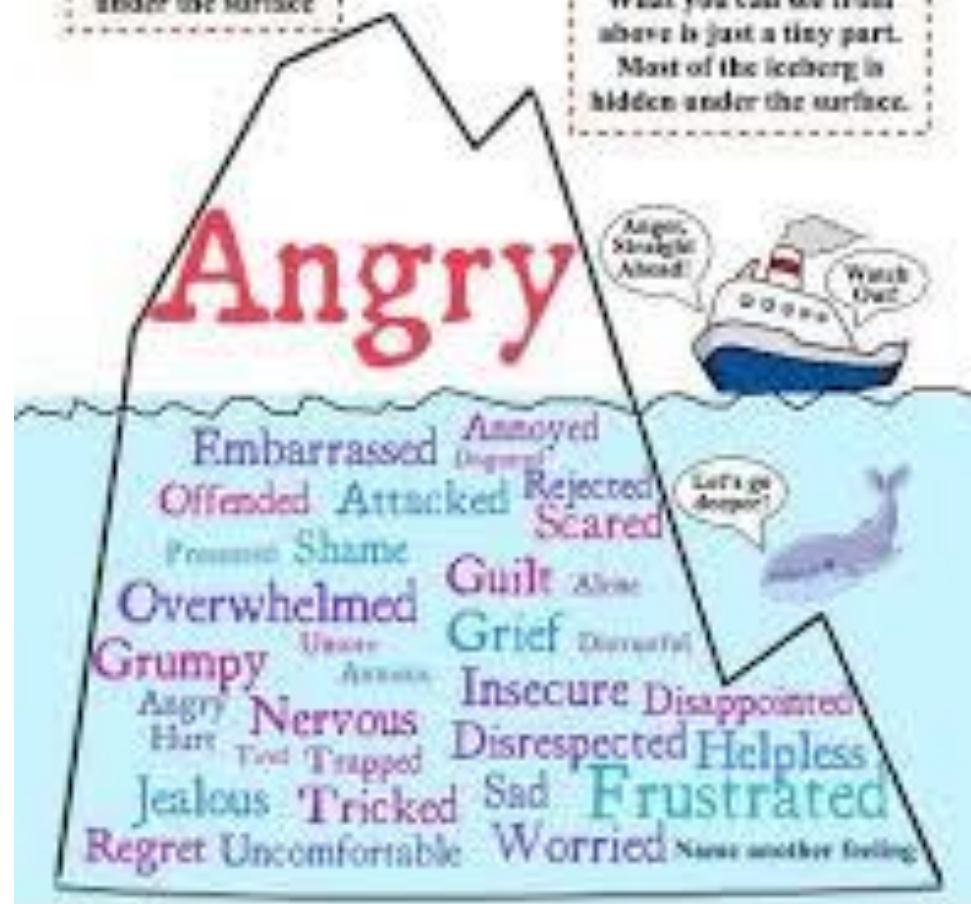
- Anxiety is processed through the senses
- The importance of the link between thoughts and feelings and behaviour
- The snowball effect
- Thought traps
- Anger can mask anxiety



Anger Iceberg

Sometimes when we are angry, there are other emotions under the surface.

Icebergs are giant floating pieces of ice found in the coldest parts of the ocean. What you can see from above is just a tiny part. Most of the iceberg is hidden under the surface.



Tops tips: how to help manage worries and regulate emotions and behaviour

- Find a good time, talk, not necessarily fix it – wonder and notice
- Some-times just listen, some-times look at evidence for and against thoughts, weigh up like a judge, thoughts not facts, ‘the story in your mind’
- gratitude journal – 3 things
- Write down worries throughout day or ‘worry time’

Tops tips: how to help manage worries and regulate emotions

Mindfulness activities: the power of connecting with the body and breathing

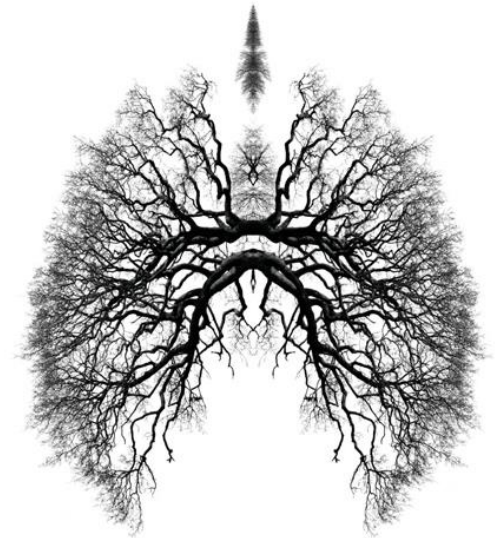
Shorter mindfulness activities: Stop, pause, breathe; hand on heart; rhythmic movement (run, walk); nature; creativity (paint, draw, bake)

Older children or adults:

1. What am I thinking? Is it helpful? What am I making this mean?
2. Pause/Stop/tune in with your body
3. Reflect: What would be a more helpful thought? Reframe

Body scan

MSBR – Palouse mindfulness



BREATHE

Tops tips: how to help manage worries and regulate emotions

- If you feel connected, your sense of stress reduces and resolves significantly
- Quality time together
- Your presence
- Laughter and kindness
- Mentalising: holding them in mind and sharing this

Emotion Coaching

Emotional coaching: John Gottman 1997: labelling emotions and empathising are powerful in building connection and reducing stress

Dan Seigal:hand model of brain <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>

It involves:

- **Talking about the emotion (acceptance that emotions are natural and normal and not a matter of choice, no disapproving)**
- **Labelling the emotion and reflect back**
- **Respecting and accepting the young person's emotion - empathise**
- **Discuss the situation which elicited the emotion**
- **Goals and strategies for coping with the situation**
- **Clear boundaries**

Emotional Coaching Scripts

I can see you feel angry, I would also feel pretty angry if that happened to me, in fact when I....

You seem worried, am I right?

You're pretty fed up, I get it... I would feel the same

Don't ASK WHY! They usually won't know or won't have the words to describe it

But set boundaries of behaviour - that certain things are not acceptable but retain young person's self-dignity

Problem solve, scaffold and empower WHEN THE YOUNG PERSON IS CALM

Top Tips: how else to manage behaviour

Rewards and punishment – focus on rewards

Support with planning if needed

Moderate screen time: joint discussion and planning, flexible but firm

Reach out to peers or those they connect with

More significant depression/anxiety

Online forums e.g. Kooth, MHST, Kids helpline, e-headspace and Youth Beyond Blue

Resources

Russ Harris- The Happiness Trap

Cathy Creswell – Helping your Child with Fears and Worries

Inventing Ourselves- Sarah Jayne Blakemore

<https://www.haringey.gov.uk/children-and-families/local-offer/covid-19-guidance>

<https://www.haringey.gov.uk/children-and-families/local-offer/5-15-year-olds/educational-psychology-service>