

# Coping with Stress and Anxiety: Empowering Children

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# Scenarios

- 5 year old cries daily on the playground and begs you to stay at school
- 8 year old won't get on the school bus for a third week in a row
- 9 year old can't sleep worrying about the upcoming birthday party this weekend
- Your 10 year is begging you not to go out with your friends
- Your 11 year old wanted to sign up for hockey but hasn't gone since the first practice and wants to quit

# Stats and Facts

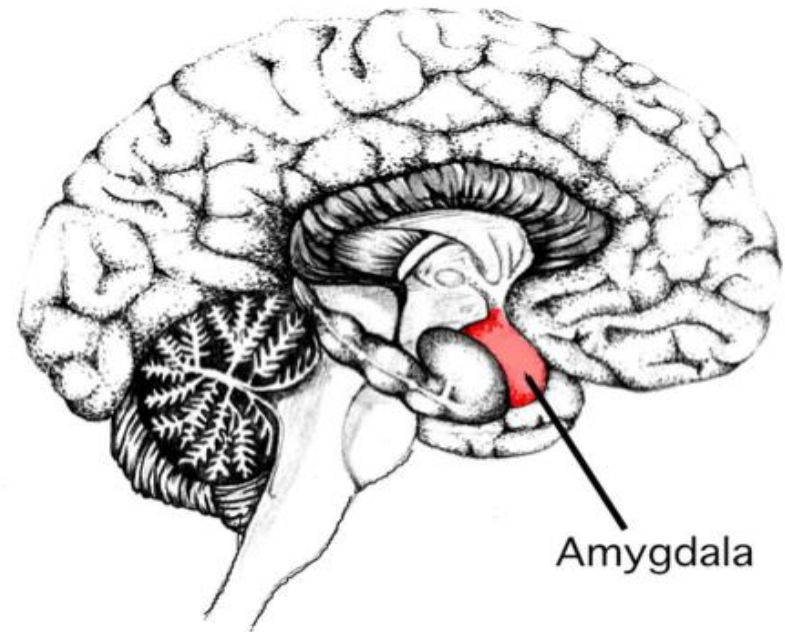
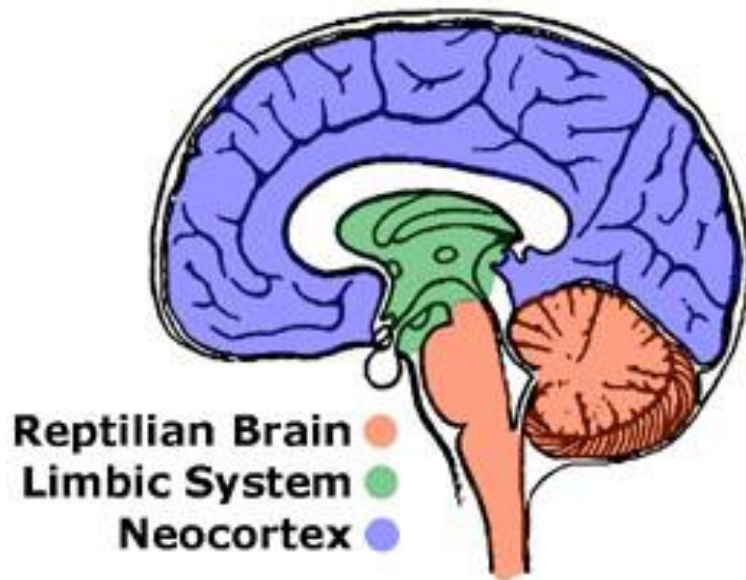
- 1 in 5 or 3%-20% of children and adolescents (NASP, 2010)
- 75% of all mental health issues begin before 25 years
- Gender ratio 1:1 during elementary (NASP, 2010)

# What is stress?

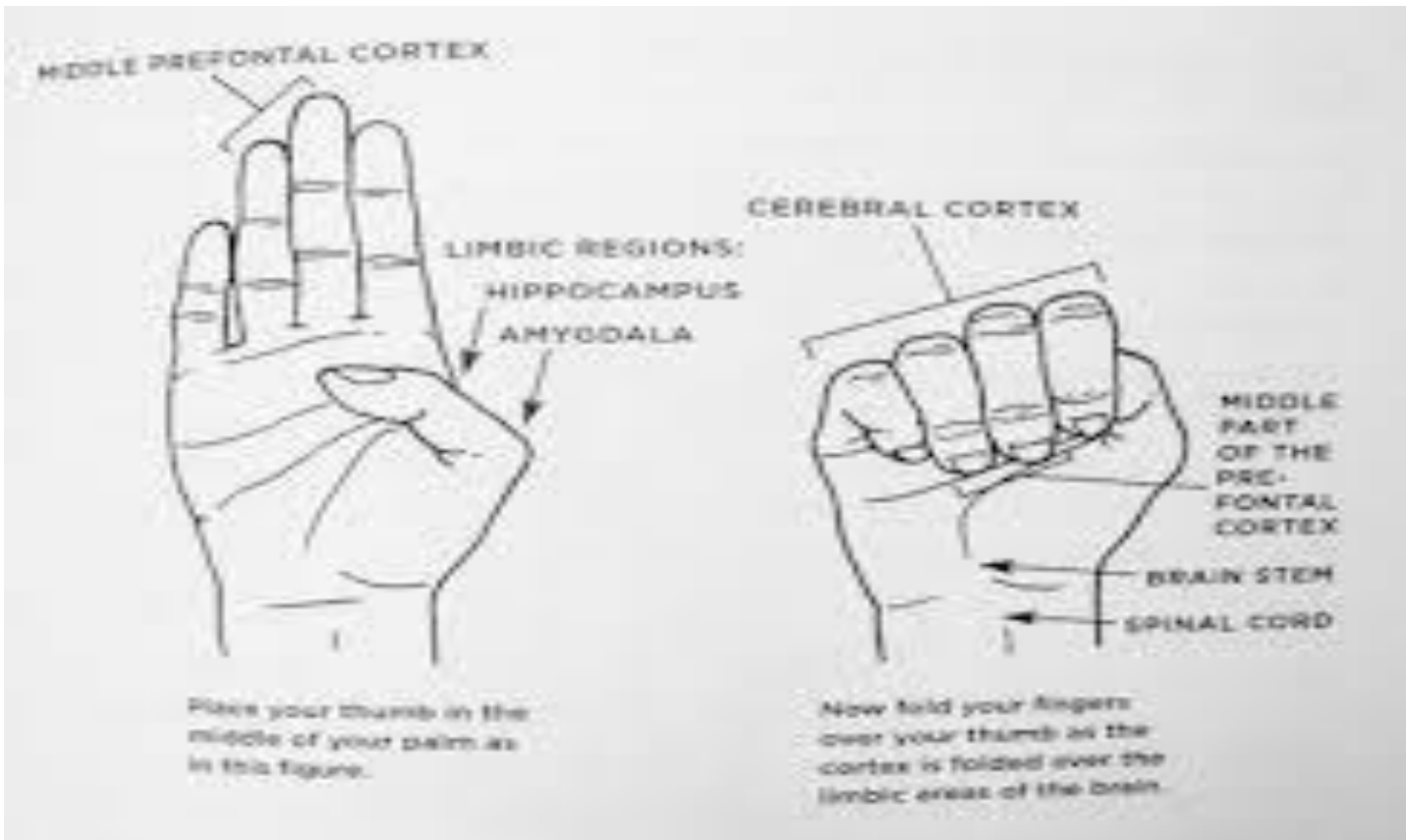
- A natural reaction
- Our perceptions and interpretations of the way our body responds to demands placed upon us by the environment (NASP, 2009)
- Serves as a protective mechanism
- Chronic stress can be “toxic”



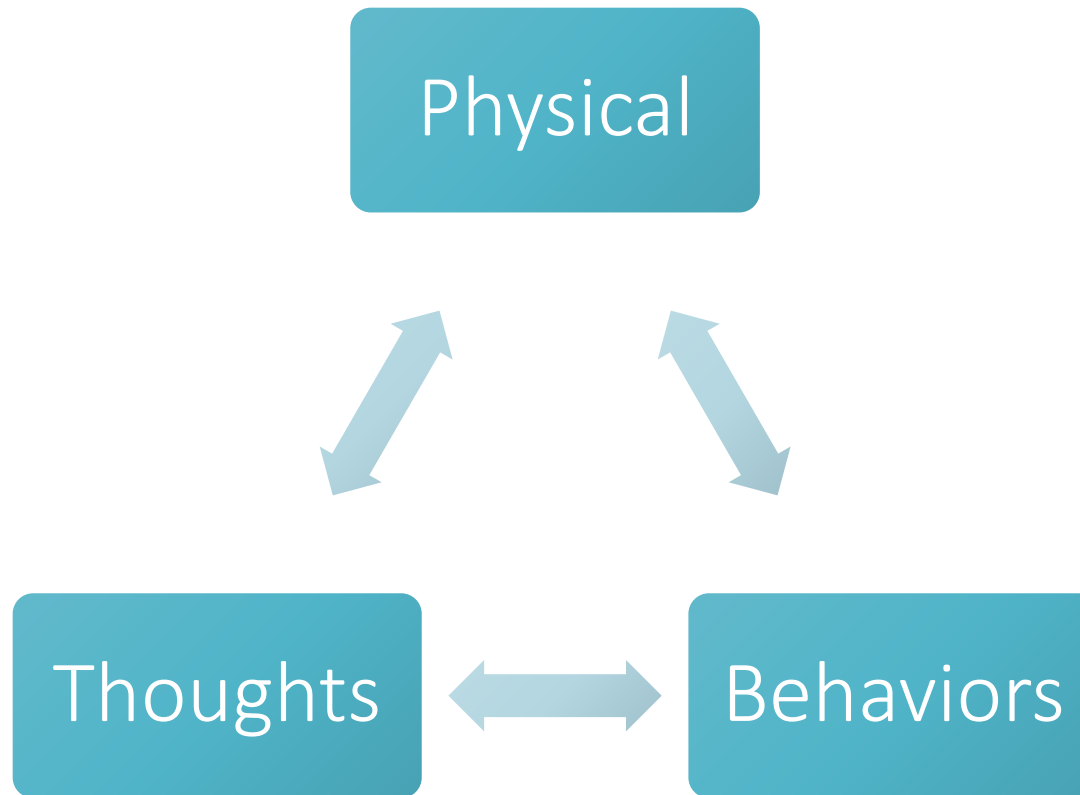
# Stress and the Brain: Fight, Flight, Freeze



# Hand Model of the Brain: Dr. Dan Siegel



# Anxiety Cycle



## Thinking/Learning

Concentration problems

Memory problems

Attention problems

Problem-solving difficulties

Worry

## Behavioral

Restlessness

Fidgeting

Avoidance

Rapid speech

Irritability

Withdrawal

Perfectionism

Lack of participation

Failing to complete tasks

Seeking easier tasks

## Physical

Stomach discomfort

Rapid heart rate

Flushing of the skin

Perspiration

Headaches

Muscle tension

Sleeping problems

Nausea



# How Can Parents Support

- Normalize stress/anxiety
- Teach the facts!
- Become a “Thought Detective” (3 Cs):
  - Catch Your Thoughts
  - Collect the Evidence
  - Challenge the Thoughts
- Change the “channel”
- Change “what if” to “what is”

# How Can Parents Support

- Work toward not avoiding!
- Give parts of your brain a “personality”
- Teach behavioural strategies
- Allow “worry time”
- Ensure your child gets appropriate amount and quality of **sleep**! Poor sleep negatively impacts brain functioning and emotional regulation.

# Prevention Techniques

- Let your child know he/she can trust you
- Encourage expression of feelings
- Teach problem solving
- Model positive coping
- Encourage positive relationships
- Encourage physical activity
- Set realistic expectations for your child's level
- Keep children informed of anticipated changes
- Interpret events positively to foster optimism

NASP, 2010

# Children's Books

Cook, Julia (2012). *Wilma Jean the Worry Machine*.

<http://www.juliacookonline.com>

Watt, Melanie - Scaredy Squirrel (series)

<http://www.scaredysquirrel.com>

# Apps & Websites

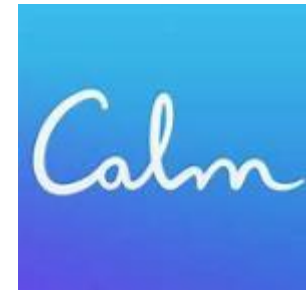
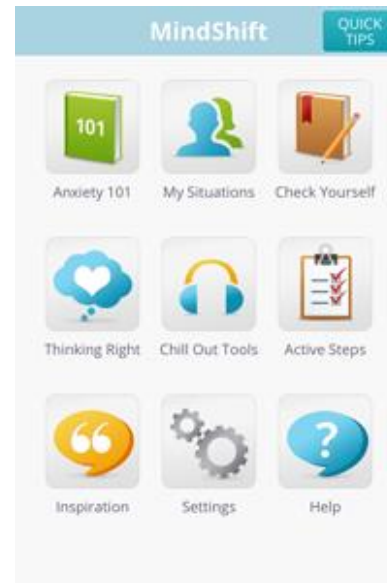
Anxietybc.com

Gozen.com

Worrywisekids.org

Anxietycanada.com

Kidshealth.org



# Where to go for help

Family Physician

Mental Health – 453-2132

Psychological Wellness Centre (UNB) – 452-6301

Private therapists

School Education Support Team

Community Programs:

- Yoga

- Mindfulness

- Gym/Sports

# Resources

*Dunn Buron, Kari (2006). When my worries get too big: A relaxation book for children who live with anxiety.*

*Matthews, Bonnie (2006). What to do when you worry too much: A kid's guide to overcoming anxiety.*

*Shapiro, L. & Sprague, R. (2009). The relaxation and stress reduction workbook for kids: Help for children to cope with stress, anxiety & transitions.*

*Siegel, D. & Payne Bryson, T. (2011). The whole-brain child: 12 Revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind.*