



TEEN ANXIETY AND RESILIENCE

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KEY INSIGHT #1

Alarm is a natural and necessary emotion, which protects us from dangers



KEY INSIGHT #2

Cannot address anxiety by focusing on the symptoms directly

“
Beneath every behavior is a feeling. And beneath every feeling is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behavior, we begin to deal with the cause not the symptom.”

— Ashleigh Warner
Psychologist

edutopia



KEY INSIGHT #3

Some individuals are more at-risk towards developing anxiety problems



KEY INSIGHT #4

Most individuals don't need experts to support and accompany them. Caring adults can be enough to become the teens best bet.

Defining emotion

We don't choose to be affected emotionally.
Emotion:

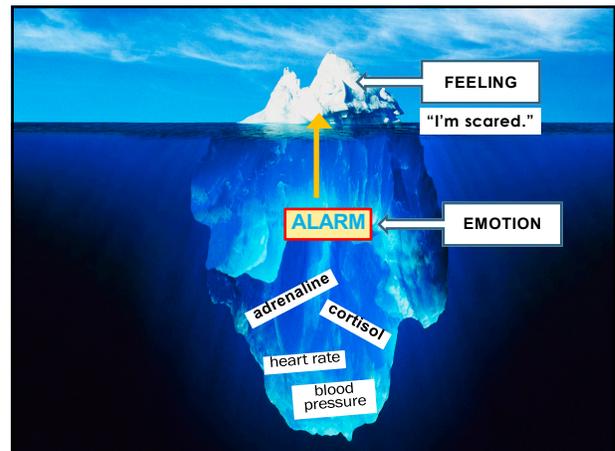
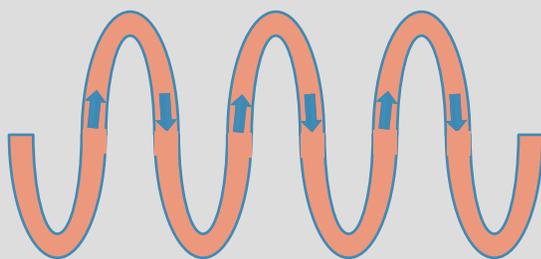
- Stirs us up:
 - *Happens to us as opposed to under our control;*
 - *Is irrational although the brain has its reasons.*
- Moves us:
 - *in ways that would serve us;*
 - *creates an action potential that seeks expression.*

Why is it important to express emotion?

Emotion has work to do

- Feeling of alarm protects us from danger
- Feeling of frustration helps us not give up
- Feeling of pursuit allows to preserve our attachments

Emotion MOVES us



Anatomy of Alarm

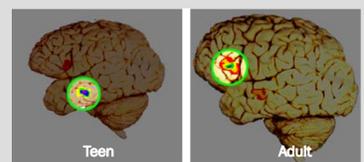
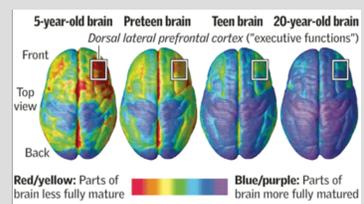
- perceptions
- feelings
- impulses
- emotion
- physiology
- chemistry

consciousness ↑

Impact of immaturity on alarm

Immaturity of the brain = Emotions not tempered by the prefrontal cortex

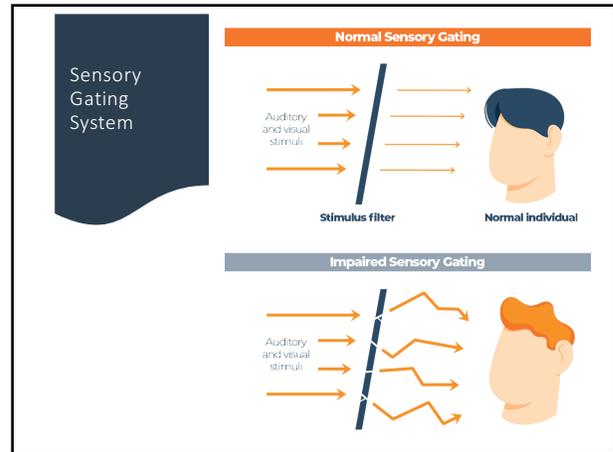
Alarm comes out very **INTENSELY & UNFILTERED**



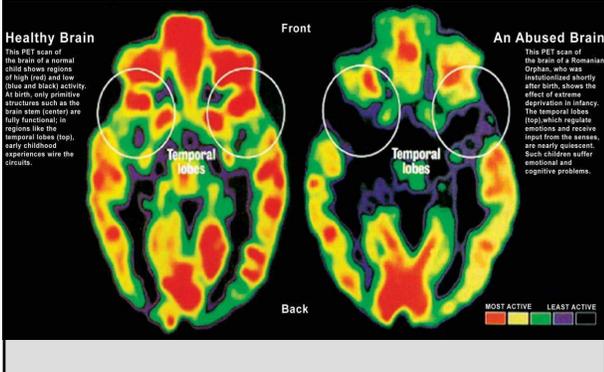
IMPACT OF Sensitivity and EMOTIONAL intensity ON ALARM & ANXIETY

Greater individuals are hypersensitive and emotionally intense:

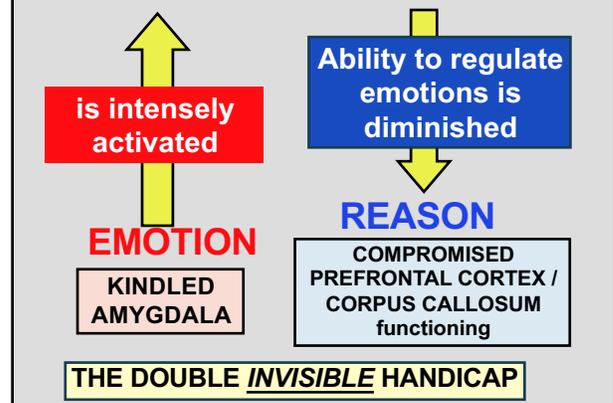
- More easily they are affected and moved by their emotions
- More easily they are overwhelmed by their emotional experience
- More likely they are to be "stuck" emotionally:
 - Emotional intensity evokes more defenses
 - Intellectualization of experiences (escape of emotions)
 - Loss of tears necessary for adaptation
- More adults attempt in calming the person in order to avoid emotional eruptions, which doesn't help the situation



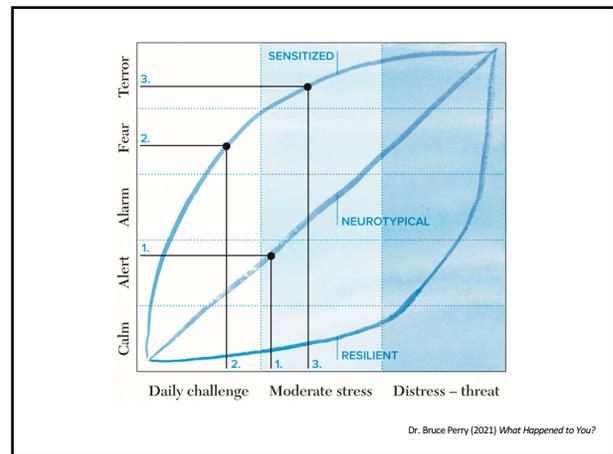
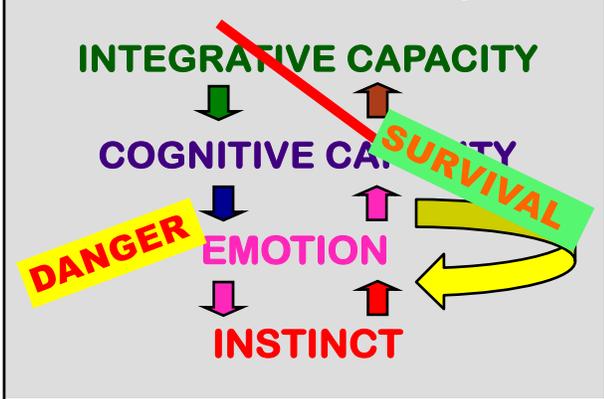
Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences



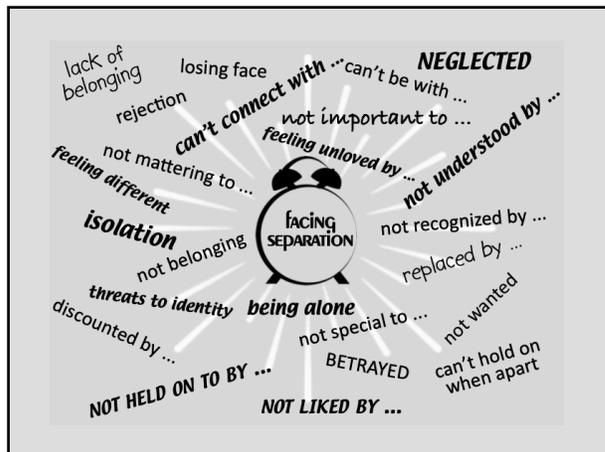
Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences



Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences



WHAT TRIGGERS EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION?



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.

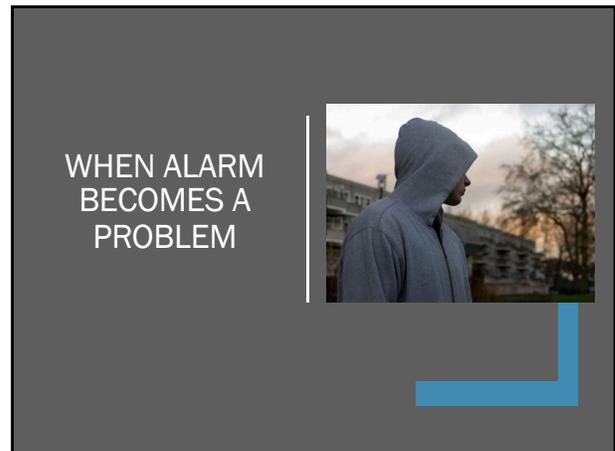
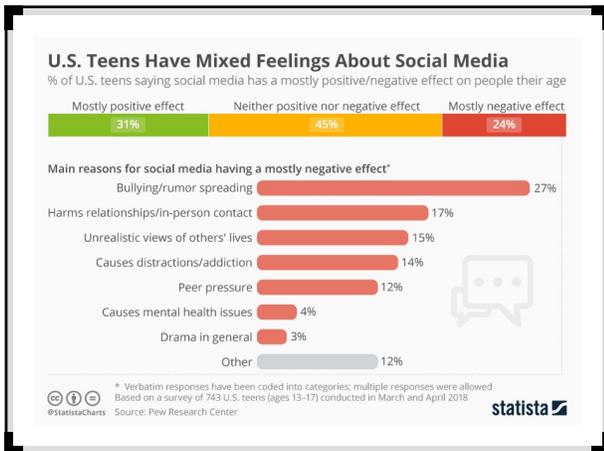
Performance anxiety

- Focused on doing well
- Needing to 'win'
- Cannot make mistakes
- Trying to be perfect



Impact of social media

- Social etiquette is not always as well respected online as it may be in person (easier to be mean to someone through typing than by speaking to them face-to-face)
- Social Media App functions (likes, followers, comments, etc.) increase negative emotional impact.



Just because you've dealt with the stressor doesn't mean you've dealt with the **stress** itself.

WHEN DEFENDED AGAINST VULNERABILITY

Being exposed to:

- Overwhelming sensitivity
- Wounding environment

It could lead to defendedness and stuckness



BRAIN Defense system

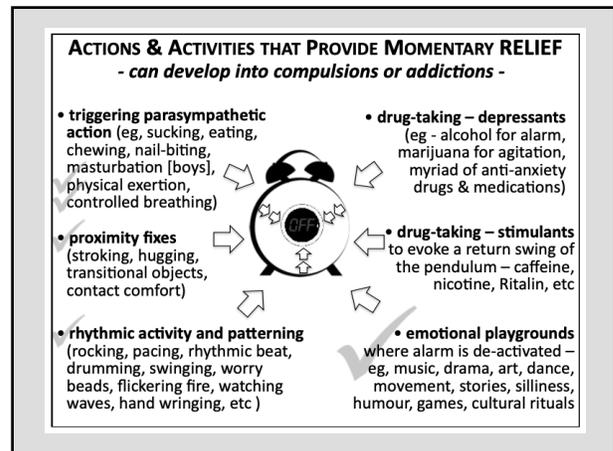
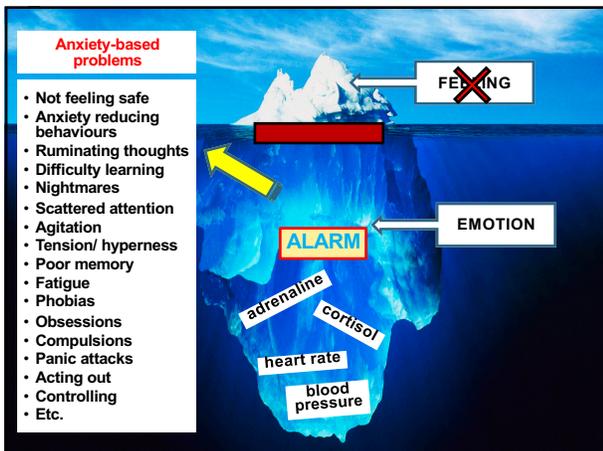
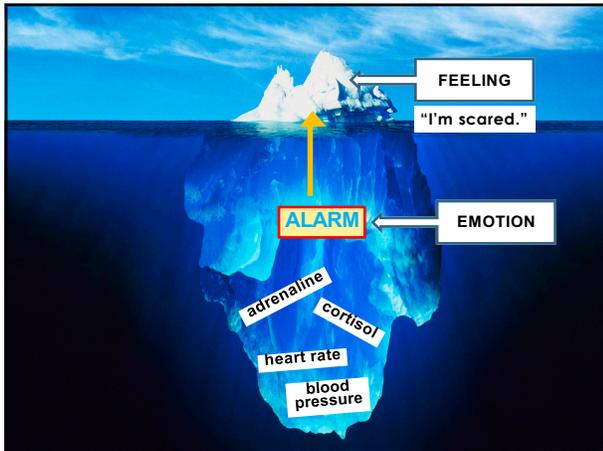
Our brain protects us by:

- ✓ **NUMBING OUT** feeling that are too much
- ✓ **TUNING OUT** from seeing things that would be too hard to see
- ✓ **BACKING OUT** of relationships where you might get hurt



A TIME FOR TEMPTATION

- To fill the void rather than feeling it
- The challenge is to make room for all emotions, including sadness



Can anxiety cause self-harm?

- Not all or even most people who experience anxiety will have urges to self-harm. However, studies have shown people who engage in self-harm are more likely to experience anxiety.
- Self-harm is frequently associated with a sense of release from overwhelming emotions or situations in those who engage in the behavior.
- Since anxiety is characterized by a sense of feeling overwhelmed or worried about not being able to handle life situations, self-harm acts can bring relief from anxious feelings.

HELPING TEENS COPE



When a flower doesn't bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.

- Alexander den Heijer

Addressing anxiety

Natural solution to anxiety is building:

RESILIENCE = CAPACITY TO BOUNCE BACK

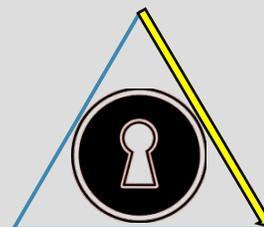


The natural solution to anxiety is...

RESILIENCE

which is the capacity to 'bounce back', to return to optimal functioning or to thrive under duress

1st key towards cultivating resilience: The sense of SAFETY



Sense of SAFETY

When being faced by adversity

Helps when feeling accompanied and supported

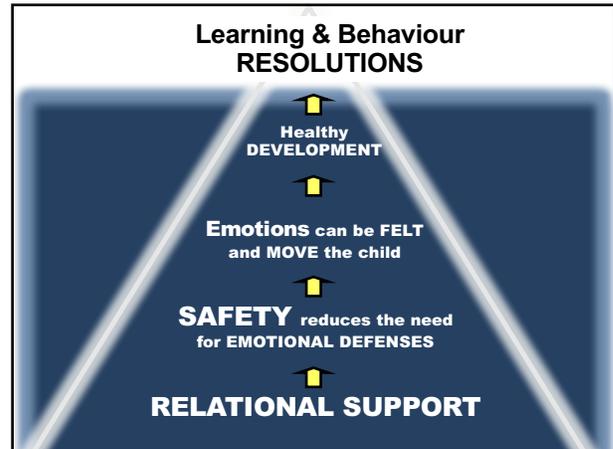
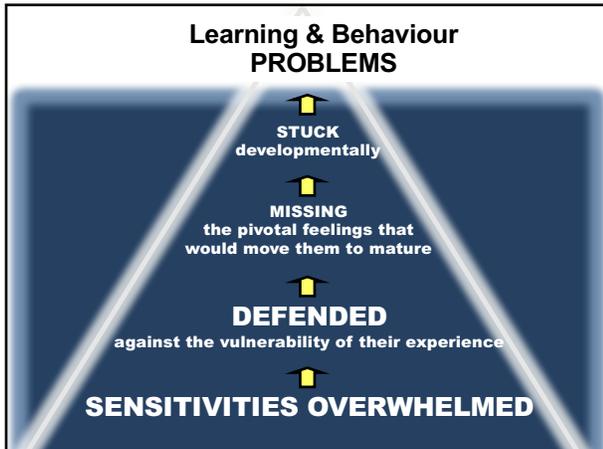
Sense of SAFETY

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 student is in a safe place or whether we believe they should be feeling safe, but rather it's the teen's own subjective experience and interpretation (feeling "Brain-Safe")

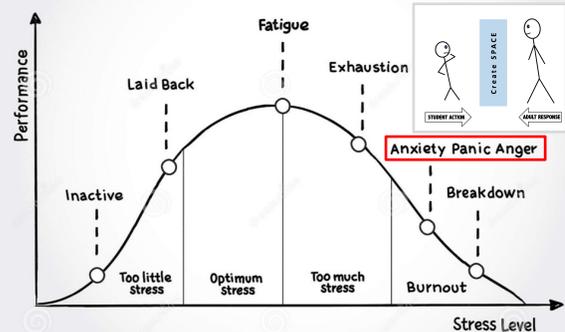


It's about Prevention

- Students typically don't respond well in crisis intervention and it is quite difficult to make headway in those circumstances, because they are:
 - ✓ Indisposed and not receptive when under stress
 - ✓ Not accessible when disengaged/disconnected from the adult(s) intervening.
- A student's success depends on:
 - ✓ Sense of safety, building attachment (requires conducive conditions)
 - ✓ Structure, routine and predictability
 - ✓ Introduction to tools/supports, exploration and practice
 - ✓ Growth happens in moments of rest

Not REACTING to student behaviour

Stress curve



2nd key towards cultivating resilience:
EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Recognizing one's
EMOTION
Sense of
VULNERABILITY

Helps when being
invited to express
and feeling
comforted



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 the teen to express and name their feelings
- Through emotional playgrounds that are one-step-removed from the situation

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

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

To come alongside a person's feelings is to
Refrain from:

- Judging feelings
- discounting/negating/countering feelings
- conveying that they are too much to handle
- focusing on 'solving the problem'

FIVE STEPS to emotional health and maturity



Emotional maturity can only develop one-step-at-a-time and must start at the beginning.

The benefits of VENTING



Sometimes, all we need is to let it out.

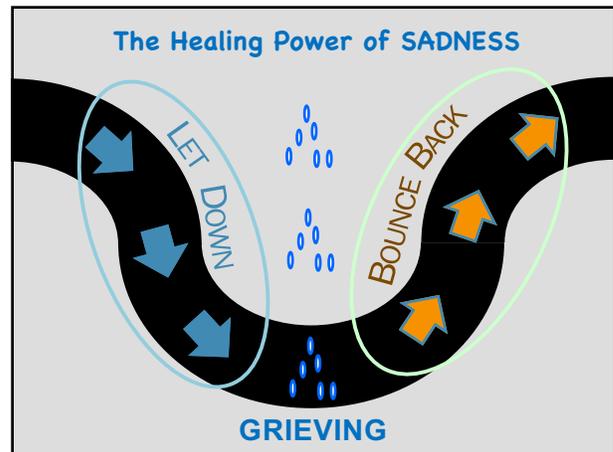
Adaptation - Resilience

The **EMOTIONAL PROCESS** whereby we are changed by that which we cannot change

It's a **TRANSFORMATION**

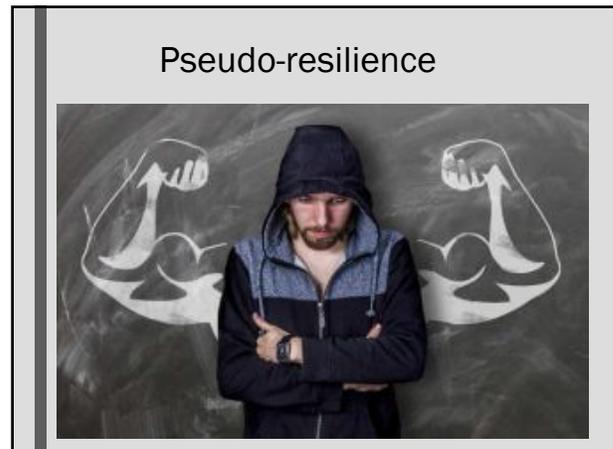


The journey of adaptation is a journey of **SADNESS** and **TEARS**



THE PROBLEM WITH "RIGHT" THINKING

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

COPING IS NOT ADAPTATION

- **Coping** is about **MANAGING** in the situation (Powering through)
- **Adapting** is an **EMOTIONAL JOURNEY**

If we allow ourselves to pass through sadness, it results in **RESILIENCE**

Emotions AT PLAY

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

- Dancing and movement
- Journaling/poetry
- Sketchbook
- Musical instrument
- Voice/song
- Photography
- Any hobby
- Etc.



PLAY and RESILIENCE

PLAY AS A NEURAL EXERCISE

Dr. Porges describes the play mode 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

3rd key towards cultivating resilience: The sense of COURAGE



Sense of **COURAGE**

Find strength and confidence in the face of adversity and discomfort

Helps when it's being reflected back

Sense of COURAGE

*How can we help a student feel **STRONG & CONFIDENT enough** in the face of adversity and discomfort?*

- Through normalizing the alarm and conveying to the student your belief in their capacity
- Through helping the student discover their **COURAGE**
- Through experiencing some sense of control in the play mode (e.g. role playing)

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.
 - ✓ Even though everything worked out, I know you were really worried

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

<p>DESIRE</p> <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 		<p>ALARM</p> <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
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COURAGE requires Prefrontal cortex development

Youth rely more on the **Amygdala** (limbic system)

Adults rely more on the **Prefrontal Cortex**

FIVE STEPS to emotional health and maturity

Self-regulation starts with **CO-REGULATION** and an invitation to express oneself emotionally

Our ROLE as the adult

teacher
Educator
Parent
COACH
Technician
Principal
counsellor

Adjusting our VIEW

- Understanding that alarm is a universal emotion we all contend with.
- Acknowledging that alarm happens to us as opposed to under our control.

Adjusting our STANCE

- Not alarming our teen with our own fears, frustrations or disapproval.
- Normalizing the experience of alarm and avoiding trying to 'fix' it.

Making ROOM for

- Teen's thoughts and feelings around their experiences of anxiety.
- Various types of creative expression and emotional release.

...even the uncomfortable stuff.

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

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