

Let's think about...

DEALING WITH









SEEK ADVICE























DEALING WITH STRESS & ANXIETY

This booklet in the 'Let's think about...' series for supportive adults will focus on how the brain responds to different levels of anxiety.

We know that traumatic experiences in childhood can affect coping abilities and that children and young people can really struggle to survive when they feel alone.

We will look at some practical ways to bring connection and care for your children and young people as they journey with stressful and challenging circumstances.

THE 'LET'S THINK ABOUT...' BOOKLET SERIES FOR SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

has been created in collaboration with Safe Families and TLG.

Safe Families are a charity who know that facing life alone is hard and when you feel there is no one there to support you it is a scary place to be.

We offer support, hope and belonging to improve the lives of those in our communities. We link children, young people and families, with local volunteers who can offer them help and support.





TLG are a charity helping to bring a hope and a future for struggling children in communities by resourcing and equipping local church.

From crisis in education to poverty and hunger, there are children and young people across the UK facing some of the toughest starts in life.

We believe change is possible and that's why in all our work we are resolved to transform lives for good.



CONTENTS

Anxiety and the Brain	6-7
A low amount of stress and anxiety	8-9
A medium to large amount of stress and anxiety	10-11
A large amount of stress and anxiety	12-13
How to respond to each amount of stress felt	14-15
Red - when they're in Panic	16-19
Amber - When they are Alarmed	20-23
Green - When they are Calm	24-27
Further Reading	30



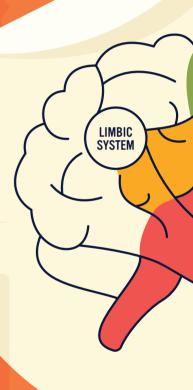
When stress and worries grow, there is a lot going on in the brain.

This diagram shows the 3 main areas of the brain that activate in different ways depending on how much stress is being felt.



EMOTIONAL BRAIN

This too can be known as part of the 'Downstairs' brain with a keen awareness in RELATIONAL CONNECTION.



THINKING BRAIN

This can be known as the 'Upstairs' brain and works best when safety and connection are felt.

LET'S LOOK AT OUR BRAIN



AUTOMATIC BRAIN

This also can be known as the 'Downstairs' brain with a keen awareness in SAFETY.



In the following pages we will look at what happens in these parts of the brain when we experience low, medium and large amounts of stress.



A LOW AMOUNT

of stress and anxiety



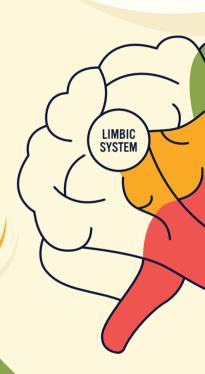
When there is little stress or anxiety the brain and nervous system are calm. This is the best kind of environment to learn and grow in.



EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

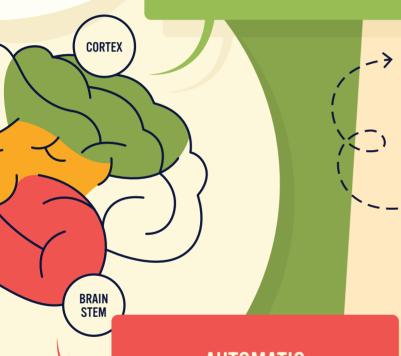
This part of the brain is calm because this persor can connect positively with the people they are relating to.

EVERYTHING WE CAN DO TO CREATE THIS SPACE FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WILL HELP THEM TO BE IN A PLACE TO REFLECT, LEARN, MATURE AND DREAM FOR THEIR FUTURE.



THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain is engaged and inquisitive, grow in skill and ability.



AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is calm because this person is feeling safe in the space they are in and the people they are with.

GOOD STRESS

Some stress can be good for us:

- Having an exam
- Giving a presentation
- Performing in front of others
- Speaking up
- Answering a question in front of others
- Giving an opinion
- Learning a new task
- Meeting new people

These stresses put our children and young people to the test, but the nerves they feel will be manageable when they are feeling SAFE, CONNECTED to others and PREPARED with good information.

In this good environment, mistakes can be made, accepted and seen as a way of learning even more.





A MEDIUM AMOUNT

of stress and anxiety



A medium amount of stress and anxiety can begin to feel overwhelming for our children and young people. They will be wanting to strengthen positive connections with those they care about because they feel the need for reassurance and protection.



EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

This part of the brain is alarmed and uncertain because this person is not feeling connected positively to the people they are with.





THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain has paused and the emotions are more activated which stops clear and objective thinking.

CORTEX

BRAIN STEM

Medium amounts of stress can be felt when children and young people are feeling physically or emotionally

This kind of anxiety can be felt when they don't receive the safety and reassurance they need from caring adults around them.

WHEN ADULTS ARE:

- Distracted
- Unable to give the consistent warm connection Absent
- Threatening
- Unpredictable

WHAT WILL HELP:

- Staying kind and connected Certainty

- Showing you're keeping them in mind Staying engaged

AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is on high alert because this person is not feeling safe in the space they are in and/or the people they are with.

I FEEL REALLY ANXIOUS!





of stress and anxiety

A large amount of stress can activate the brain and bodies automatic response system. This is because there will be a feeling of powerlessness and direct threat to themselves or their main caregiver. A threat that they perceive as life threatening.

EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

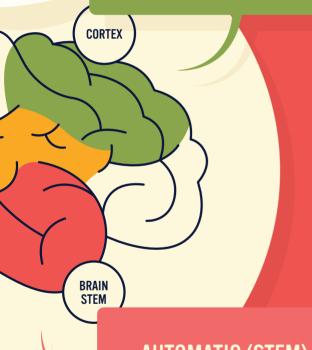
panicked and scared and may be feeling angry, shocked or numb.

I'M SO STRESSED ALL OF THE TIME!



THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain will be 'off line' or disconnected with all energies used in the 'downstairs' brain areas.



AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is actively switching on the automatic response systems which will cause this person to fight, run or freeze.

THE TYPES OF EXPERIENCES THAT **CAN CAUSE A HUGE AMOUNT OF** STRESS AND ANXIETY:

- Permanent separation from main care giver
- Long term separation from main care giver
- Ongoing physical harm
- Ongoing bullying mental or physical
- Life threatening circumstances
- · Lack of strong bond with a warm, caring, safe adult.

WHAT WILL HELP:

- Commitment to safety
- Reassurance of safety
- Consistent quality caring time every day
- Times given to talk about worries
- Lots of 'together' time with an emotionally healthy, supportive adult
- Safe calm spaces to process emotions





LA LA LA! NOT LISTENING!



BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION

We can often respond to the emotional signals or behaviours first and forget to remember that there is a reason for them.

The emotions and actions give helpful clues to what they feel behind the behaviour.

When children and young people respond with aggressive words or actions, withdrawing or being uncooperative you can:

- Take a breath or two
- Ask yourself what are they really feeling?
- Respond first to the feeling "I can see you're really feeling it.", "I'm seeing this is hard for you."
- Help them see you understand: "It's understandable that you're feeling that way."



Let's have a look at What signals we might see when different levels of stress are being felt.

REDWhen they're in Panic

When a child and young person is feeling a huge amount of stress and anxiety they can often feel panicked and respond with fight, flight or freeze reactions.

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feeling NUMB/ RAGE/PANICKED, needing someone to step in to bring safety, calm and care.



THINKING BRAIN

Is switched off.

AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

ACTIVE and switches on the nervous system so that both automatically respond with fighting, running away or switching off.



SIGNALS

FIGHT



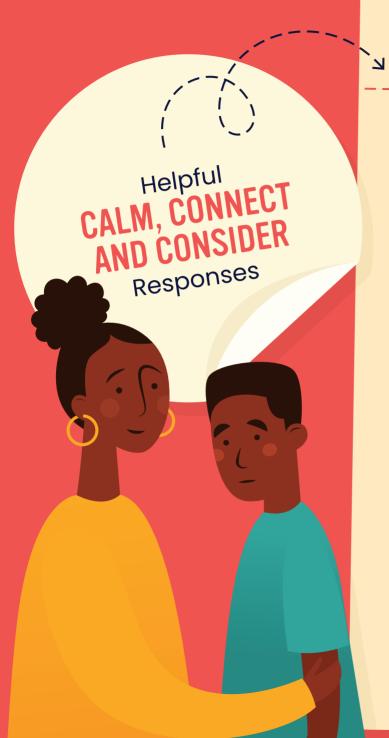
Fight with words or actions
Aggressive
Angry
Agitated

FLIGHT

Running off from a place or person
Avoiding a place or person
Overly obsessed with a toy/game/book
for distraction

FREEZE

Switched off/closed down
Not engaging/very tired
Self-harm
Panic attacks



CALM

Children and young people will need more than being told to 'calm down', they need to be shown HOW to calm down, and know that you are there to help them.

Ways you could do this:

- Help them breathe deeply and slowly. This helps calm their nervous system.
- Focus on letting them know you see them and that you care for them.
- Don't focus on their language and/or behaviour straight away. You can get to that when they are really calm and ready to chat.

You could say...

I SEE YOU.

LET'S TAKE SOME DEEP BREATHS TOGETHER.

I CAN SEE YOU'RE REALLY
FEELING IT RIGHT NOW

CONNECT

As you help them breathe, another way that can bring calm is by staying connected to them through calm time just 'being' together still or actively doing something that engages their senses.

Ways you can do this:

- Sit with them.
- Go for a walk with them (long or quick)

 sometimes moving away from the room or space you're in can really help.
- Get a drink or snack together an activity that engages as many of their senses as possible.

You could say...

I'M HERE FOR YOU.

I CARE ABOUT YOU.

I CARE ABOUT HOW YOU'RE FEELING.



Only when your child or young person is safe and connected with you, can they then feel able to talk about what is going on for them. It is helpful to listen to them first, so that they can feel heard and involved in what happens next.

Ways you can do this:

- Listen with an open mind.
- Accept their emotions and their side of things.
- Don't assume you know what they're thinking.
- Repeat back what you've heard from them – to check you've understood.
- Share your thoughts and make a plan of response to anyone/anything together.

You could say...

I HEAR YOU.

I'M LISTENING, I WANT TO UNDERSTAND.

TELL ME IF I'VE GOT THIS RIGHT...

AMBER

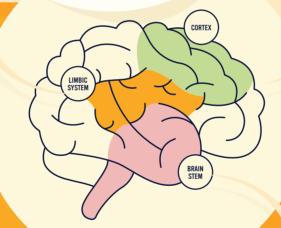
When they are Alarmed

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feeling **ALARMED** and **SCARED** and needing reassurance that they are positively connected to those they care about.

THINKING BRAIN

Feels **PAUSED** as the emotions are more activated which stops clear thinking.



AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

On **HIGH ALERT** because they don't feel safe.

SIGNALS

ACTING OUT



Wanting everyone to do
what they say
Angry outbursts
Can't sit still
Needing to be the
centre of attention

Stamping
Crying
Trying to get your attention
in a physical way
Giddy

WITHDRAWING

Going off by themselves

Blending in to
the background

Often tired

Floppy

Struggles to concentrate

Hides away

Not very talkative

Distracted







You can do this by helping your child or young person in developing ways of HOW to find calm.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Acknowledge that we all feel big emotions at times and that it's understandable.
- Create a 'Sensory Bag' together, thinking about how to include all of their senses, to help them feel calmer.

Stress ball

Fidget to

BlueTac

Play dough

Moisturiser for hand massage

Pad and pen

Calming playlist to listen to

Small puzzle cube or snake

Pictures of people important to them

You could say:

I CAN SEE YOU'RE FEELING Frustrated, I'm here to listen.

Wonder out loud:

I WONDER IF YOU'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOUR GRANDMA IN HOSPITAL...IT'S REALLY NORMAL TO FEEL UNCERTAIN AND WORRIED.

CONNECT

Staying connected can really help your child or young person feel able to face the challenges and worries they face. Keeping things relational will be a valuable support for them.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Create, make or do something together?
- Give a warm drink or snack to them.
- Give them a hand written note of encouragement to show you're thinking about them.
- Listen to music together talk about the lyrics and what you each like about them.
- Do an object swap so that you have something of theirs to keep and they have something of yours to keep until you see each other again.



When your child or young person is feeling calm and connected with you, they can then feel safe enough to talk about what is going on for them.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Listen with an open mind to what they have to say.
- Hear them out.
- Create a Worry bag or box write and draw the things they are anxious about.
- Make a Thankful bag or box to write and draw the things they're glad about.
- Play games that help them name the emotions they feel.

You could say...

I ENJOY HEARING YOUR THOUGHTS.

THAT WAS AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION, THANK YOU.

GREENWhen they are Calm

Feed their Interests with information and skilful development

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feels **CONNECTED**positively with
those they are
relating to.



THINKING BRAIN

Feels **ENGAGED** and **INQUSATIVE**, wanting to learn and be stretched.

AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

Feels **SAFE** in the space they are in and the people they are with.

SIGNALS

CALM

Relaxed
Enjoying learning or creating
Inquisitive
Open about feelings
Reflective

ENGAGED

Have areas of interest
Hobbies
Physical activity
Sociable with adults
Sociable with peers

ALERT

Able to handle a little stress
Interest is stronger than nerves
Pressures coped with
Able to ask for help



When they are calm, they are in the best place to learn, reflect and grow.





Keep the calm going by feeding their interests and knowledge.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- What are they interested in? bring experiences that fuel their curiosity
- Look for clubs, books, films to increase their interest and skill.
- Give them sensory items like soft blankets and toys or cushions.
- Colouring, sorting, puzzle solving or anything repetative.

You could say...

TELL ME MORE ABOUT...

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT...



CONNECT

Keep the connection going by continuing to bring emotional support by offering time to chat and time for activities you enjoy together.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Watch a film together
- Look through their Worry bag or Thankful bag together and talk about any the child or young person is willing to chat about.
- Play a game together.
- Take time to check in with them about big emotions they've felt recently.

You could say...





Take time to reflect together on interests and knowledge they would like to develop in. Explore ways to handle the big emotions they feel sometimes.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Make a plan together about how to deal with the emotions they're feeling
- Who do they feel able to chat to and what helps calm them?
- Where can they go to get space if needed?
- Let them dream and hope for their future – hear their thoughts.

You could say...

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE OI DER?

WHAT HAVE YOU REALLY ENJOYED TODAY?

Helpful Personal Reflection NOTES



My notes + thoughts

FOR YOUR INTEREST...

Themes and responses in this booklet have been drawn from the work of specialists who have written these books:

Conversations That Matter

By Dr Margot Sunderland

Know Me to Teach Me

By Louise Bombér

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog

By Dr Bruce Perry

The Body Keeps The Score

By Bessel Van Der Kolk

The Simple Guide to Understanding
Shame in Children

By Betsey De Thierry

The Whole Brain Child

by Dr Daniel Siegal and Dr Tina Payne Bryson

Also look up via a search engine – Dr Daniel Siegal Hand Brain



















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