

# Anxiety and Autism

Week Two

Bristol Autism Team

# Recap from Week One

- What is anxiety
- Anxiety in autism
- Understanding emotions
- Some tools to help your child communicate their feelings and anxiety
- Sensory and relaxation tools
- Release the pressure and pent up frustration
- Using clear visuals, structure, preparation for change and planning

# Plan for Week Two

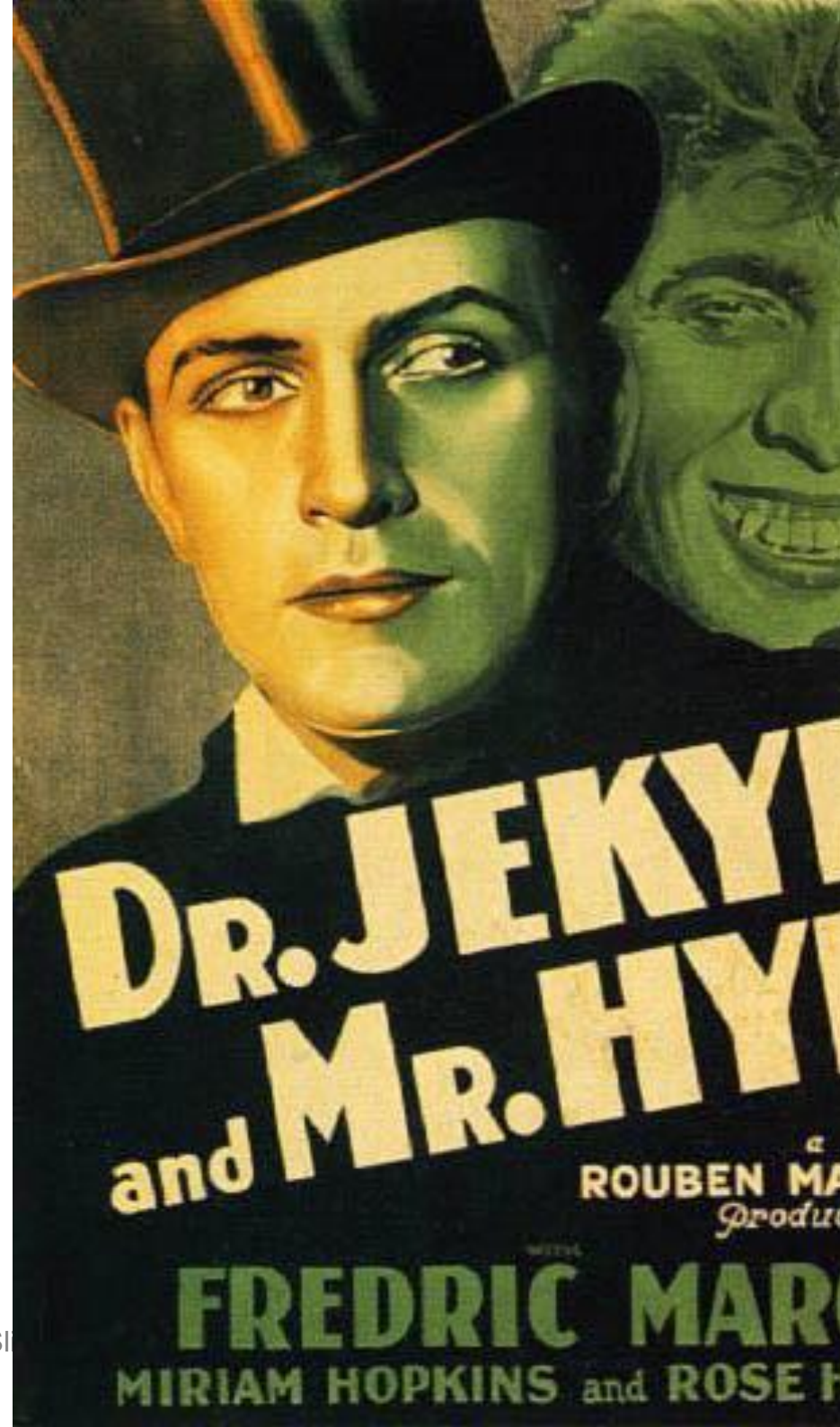
- What schools can do to help with anxiety
- Create a calm plan for your child
- Exams and revision
- Perfectionism
- Equality Act 2010
- Exams and revision
- Managing worries

# Jekyll and Hyde

Some children will react to stresses at school by “freezing” during school hours and then “exploding” in response to the slightest problem at home.

Consequently, when parents’ reports of a child’s behaviour at home differ radically from that child’s behaviour at school, teachers should not...attribute it to their superior “behaviour management” skills and the parents’ presumed inability to “handle” their child

From A Martian in the Playground, By Clare Sainsbury



# This is what schools can do

One the biggest causes of anxiety for children with autism is school

Even if your child likes school it will cause them a great deal of tiredness at the least and major stress at the worst

# What support schools should provide to your child

- The SEND code of practice says schools should follow a Graduated Approach to supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- All children with Special Educational Needs should have SEN Support
- Four step process to providing support:
  - Assess your child's needs
  - Plan the support
  - Do the support
  - Review the support (with parents at least 3 times a years)

# Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

- Bristol City Council: “If your child has been getting help in education through SEN support and, despite everyone’s best efforts, still isn’t making progress, you can ask the council to carry out an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment.”
- You can request an EHC needs assessment (and get school to support your request too, if possible). The school will need to show level of need and evidence of support over time
- An EHCP is needed to access Specialist Provision/ Resource base

# This is what schools can do

Small, and often inexpensive adjustments, can make a big difference:

- Consider who they can turn to eg named staff, buddy/pupil mentor or circle of support
- A designated quiet area to use in school
- Calm area/work stations in classroom
- Having time in the school day for solitude- drawing comics/ dinosaurs
- Quiet place to eat lunch
- Educate teachers and other pupils
- Extra support from Learning support (LSA)Teaching Assistant (TA)



# This is what schools can do

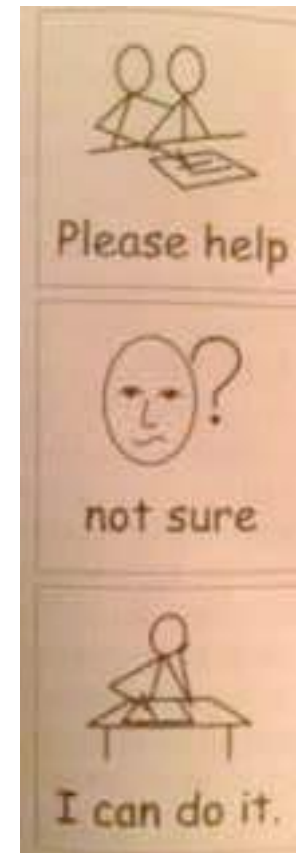
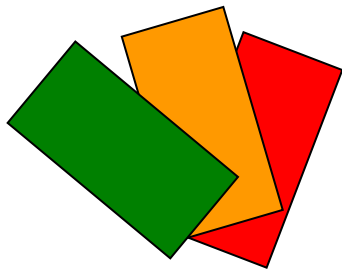
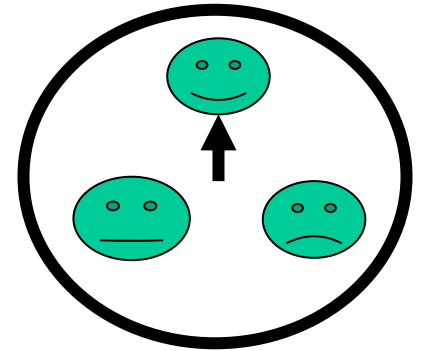
- Ask the school to provide social skills and ask for contact with other parents
- Communication with school eg email, phone call, text, link person, home-school book
- Create a Guide to my child /Calm Plan
- Support your child's homework as necessary eg study skills, making homework clear and in a visual form, reduced homework-
- Homework may be tricky as rigid thinking about school and home.

# This is what schools can do

- Circle of support eg a few pupils who agree to support your child
- Not give out detentions unless they are necessary
- Let them determine where it is best to sit
- Let them play with a quiet fiddle toy
- Transition support eg moving schools
- Clubs to go to instead of playground

# Escape plan for classroom

- Agreed system to leave the class if required
- Break card/s
- Traffic light cards



## Tommy Smith support plan

### Things that cause me stress

Loud noises

Being asked questions in class (unless I have my hand up)

Eating in front of others

Touching me or standing over me



### How you can tell if I am feeling stressed

I fidget; play with my hair

Put fingers in my ears

Get out of my seat

Answer back more

### To help me learn please:

Explain things clearly

Use simple words

Write down instructions for work

Allow me to use my Alphasmart

Address me by name

### What to do to calm me if I am stressed

Use calm body language

Don't argue

Allow me time on project work - Solar system/ Planes

Walk around playground perimeter or toilet break

### My safe people:

Mrs Smith 07790 490490I

Asif Mohammed Year 9 mentor

Safe room library /independent

learning annex (Mr Obi)



# Exams and Revision

- Ensure school have an understanding of the things that make individuals anxious - this may not always be apparent to them.
- Ensure there is revision planning and make sure this is on a timetable that includes free time and rest breaks
- Plan revision well in advance
- Allow plenty of extra space in revision timetable for unforeseen events – being ill, visits to family, losing things
- Create a work station /area if possible – table, chair and light
- Get stationery and other aids – post it notes, desk tidy, pens, wall charts, snacks and drinks
- Use cue /flash /index cards for key information to learn
- Online revision websites

# Exams and Revision

Use available exam and assessment concessions

- additional time
- rest breaks
- sit at a particular desk in exam hall
- separate room – make sure your child visits this beforehand – not just the day of the exam
- scribe or prompter
- use a computer
- introduce the invigilator to your child before the exam.

See below for more details:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education/exams>

# Exams and revision



- Use a scale (eg 50% is good, 60% is very good and 70% is outstanding) to show that an excellent outcome does not mean perfection – ie they don't have to do every question correctly. You may need a teacher to explain this to your child.
- Use social stories/ instruction manuals to reduce catastrophizing about the impact of getting a question wrong- particularly important for perfectionists.
- Relaxation exercises and tools to manage mild anxiety (breathing, imagery, positive self talk) and remember you can take a rest break.

# Other questions to consider for perfectionists

*“I am a failure if I get less than 100%”*

- Is it really true that you **must, should** or **have to**....?
- Who said you **must, should** .....etc?
- What's the worse that could happen if you didn't do X? How bad would that be? Who would mind if you don't get 100%? What happens if you don't get 100%?
- What's the evidence for this 'failure'?
- What does failure mean?

Remind your child that we can only try our best and achieve things that are realistic based on our abilities, and strengths. No one is perfect.

Build in relax and fun activity into their timetable



# Growth Mindset- Carol Dweck



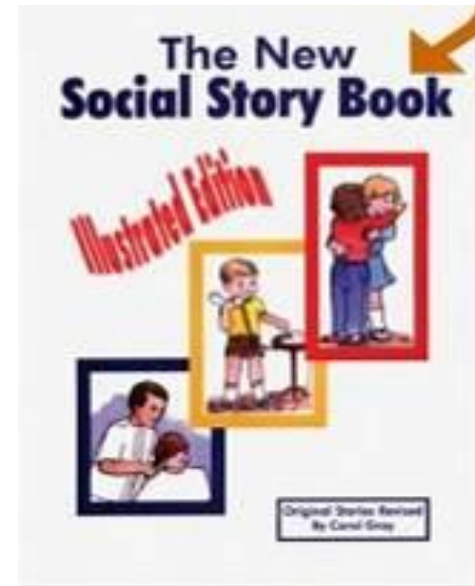
The five-episode video series highlight the power of having a growth mindset, and how any student can learn this skill.

<https://ideas.classdojo.com/b/growth-mindset>

# use Social stories™

## Making mistakes

- It is OK to make mistakes
- Everyone makes mistakes
- The cleverest people in the world make mistakes
- I can check online and see what famous inventions happened by mistake
- I can correct the mistakes I know how to correct
- I can ask for help with any other mistakes if I choose to
- It is clever and intelligent to ask for help if I make a mistake
- I can practice not worrying about making some mistakes
- I learn from my mistakes
- My brain is growing most when I make mistakes!



# If your child cannot manage school

- First what can the existing school do better? ... if you get stuck contact [bristol.autism.hotline@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:bristol.autism.hotline@bristol.gov.uk) or [sen@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:sen@bristol.gov.uk) aswell as [andrew.powell@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.powell@bristol.gov.uk)
- Supportive Parents ([www.Supportiveparents.org.uk](http://www.Supportiveparents.org.uk))
- Home education, hospital education, how many hours can they manage? (part-time may not be ideal but your child's mental health is priority)
- See the full list of the different agencies around Bristol who can offer alternative education if they cannot learn effectively in a traditional school setting:
- <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/3990065/PAL+System+Provider+Catalogue>

# The Equality Act 2010

It is against the law for schools (colleges/universities) to discriminate against disabled pupils in:

- education
- admissions
- access to the curriculum
- school trips
- sports
- school meals
- after school clubs held on school premises
- exclusions and associated services
- exams

# Make sure the Equality Act 2010 is complied with

- Failure to provide this and follow this through should be reported to [sen@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:sen@bristol.gov.uk)
- If you do not get the matter of your child's education resolved satisfactorily please discuss with independent advisors eg NAS, Supportive Parents or IPSEA

# Two key duties of the Equality Act 2010 in education

- not to treat disabled pupils **less favourably** for a reason related to their disability and
- to take **all reasonable steps** to ensure that disabled pupils are not put at a **substantial disadvantage**
- Schools also have a general equality duty – they should anticipate what your child needs so he or she can access school life

# Talk to experts in education law

**NAS Education Rights Service 0808 800 4102**

**NAS Autism Helpline 0808 800 4104**

Information sheets on many education topics

**IPSEA** (Independent Parental Special Education Advice)

**SOS!SEN 0300 302 3731** (some walk in appointments in Bristol see website)

# Share worries

- The Huge Bag of Worries by *Virginia Ironside*

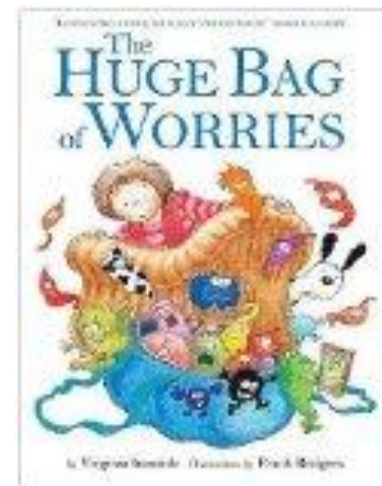
Some children need to be given an exact phrase to tell mum or dad if they are anxious eg:  
*“there’s a problem”*





# Worry time

- Gives the message that worries can be discussed and problems solved
- Sets limits on repetitive discussion
- Can be scheduled for a time everyone is calm
- Support your child to make a list of things to talk about (on board, in diary, tick list when they come in from school) then prompt to leave the discussion until worry time

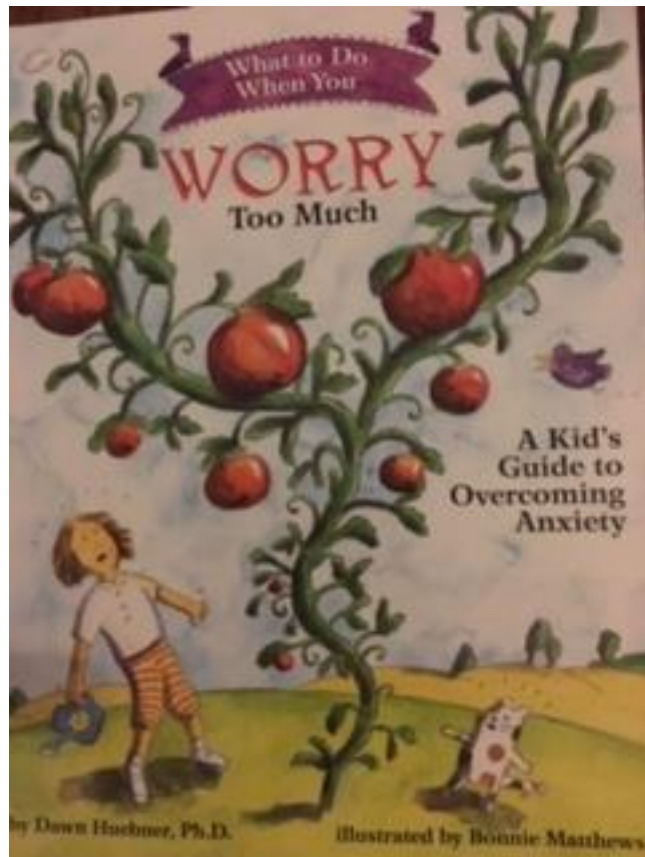


# Letting go of worries

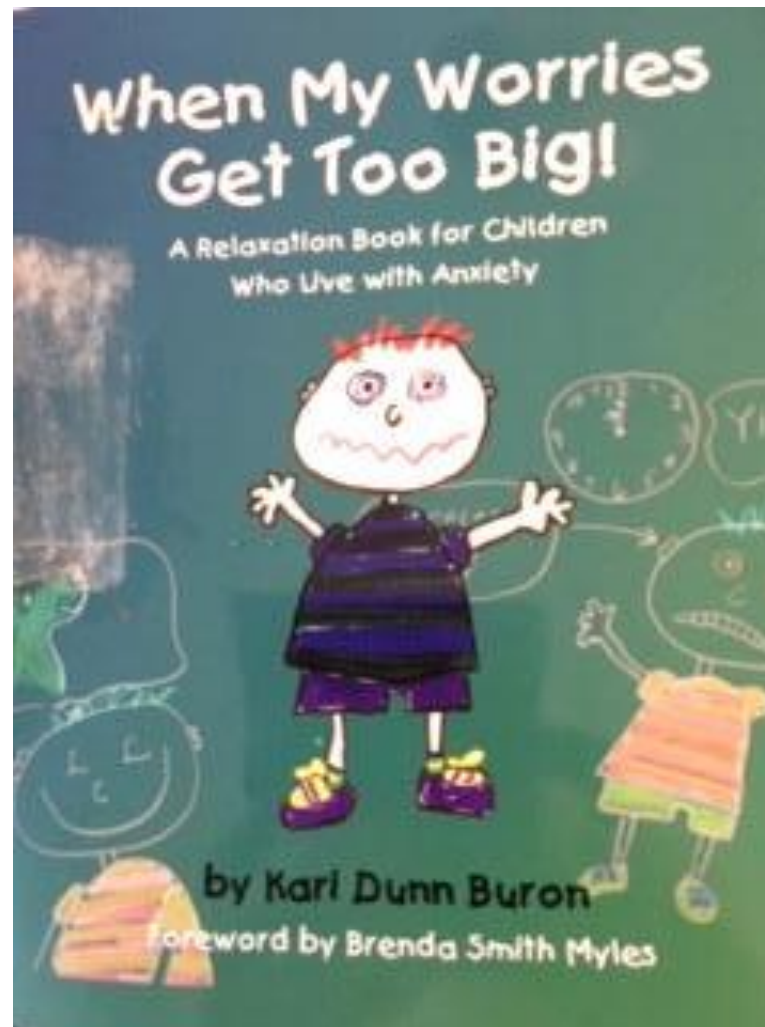
- Worries that are beyond your control can be thrown away or put in another box
- Use worry dolls to tell your worries to then put under your pillow



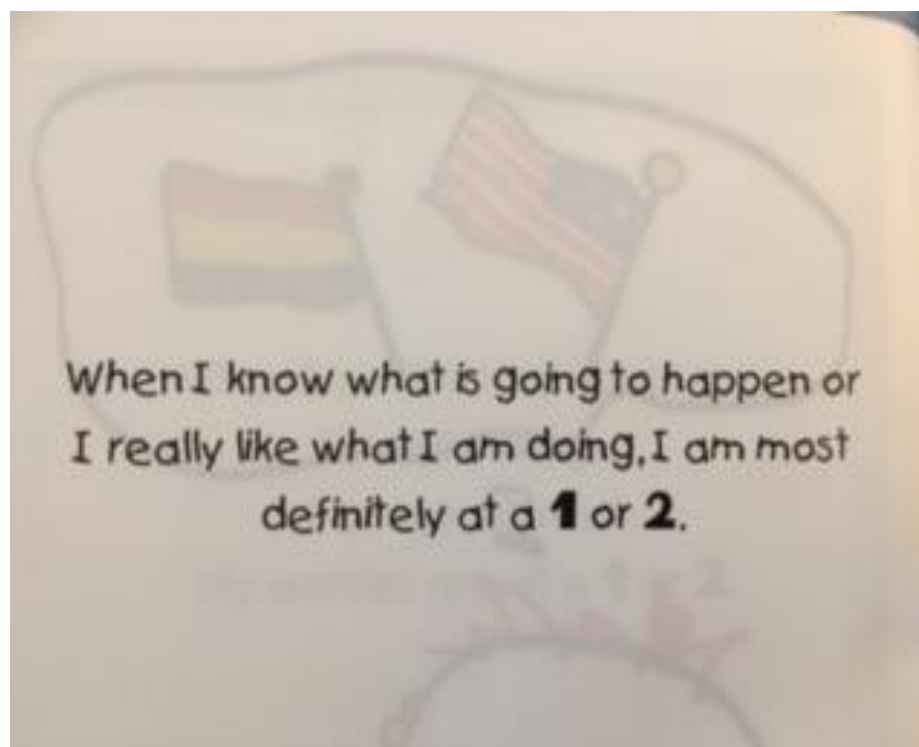
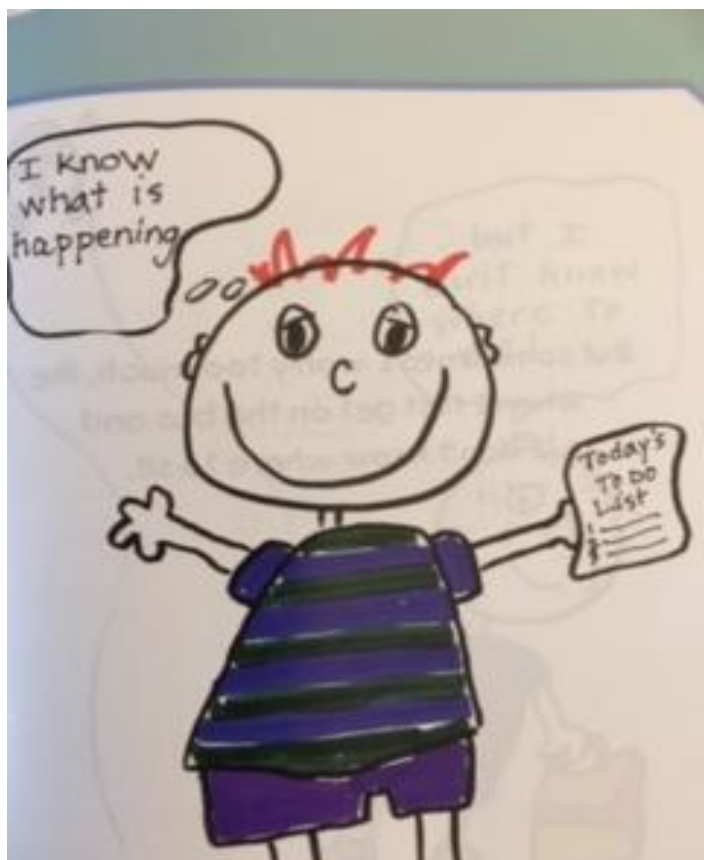
# What to do when you worry too much: A kid's guide to overcoming anxiety



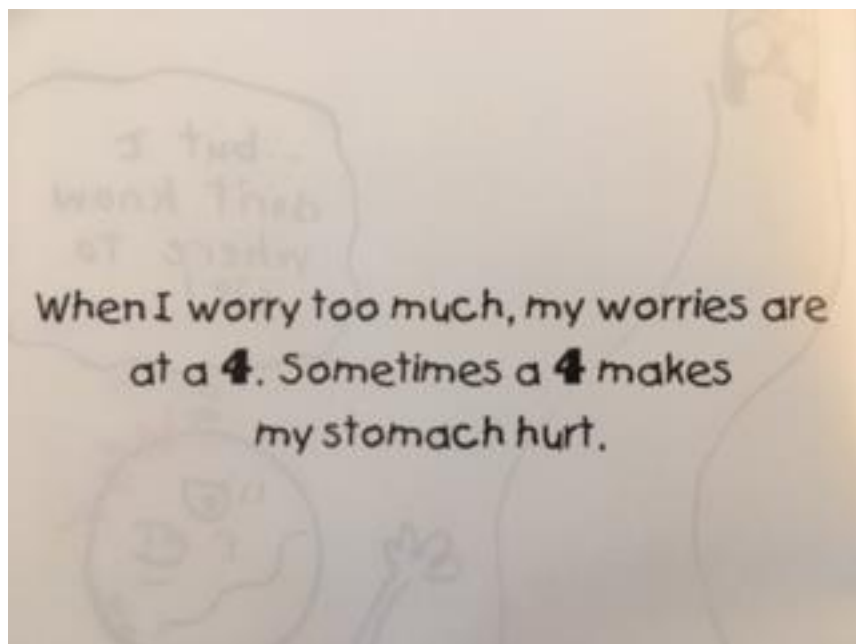
# When my worries get too big



- This book starts by explaining how your child might feel when everything is going to plan

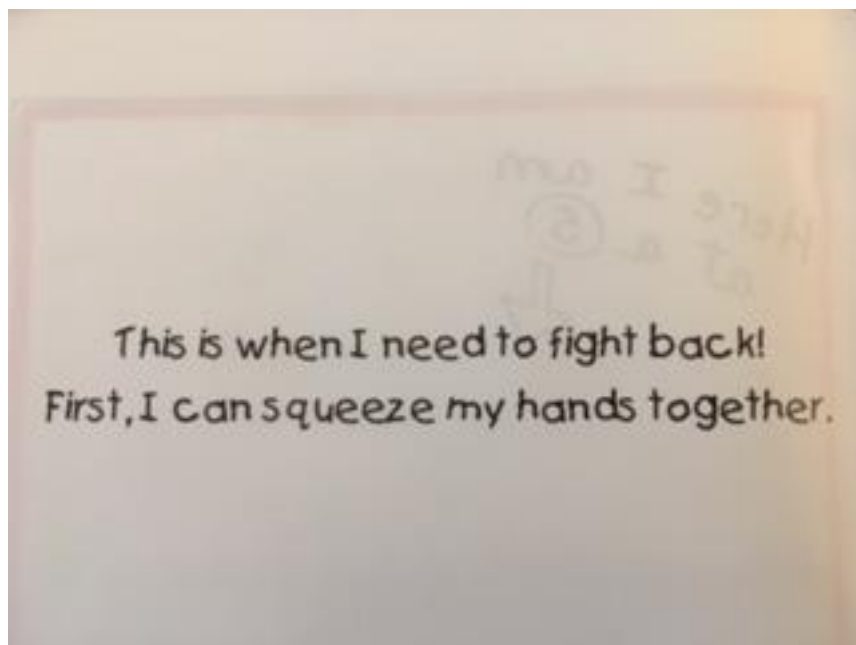


- What happens to our bodies when we feel 4/5 worried?

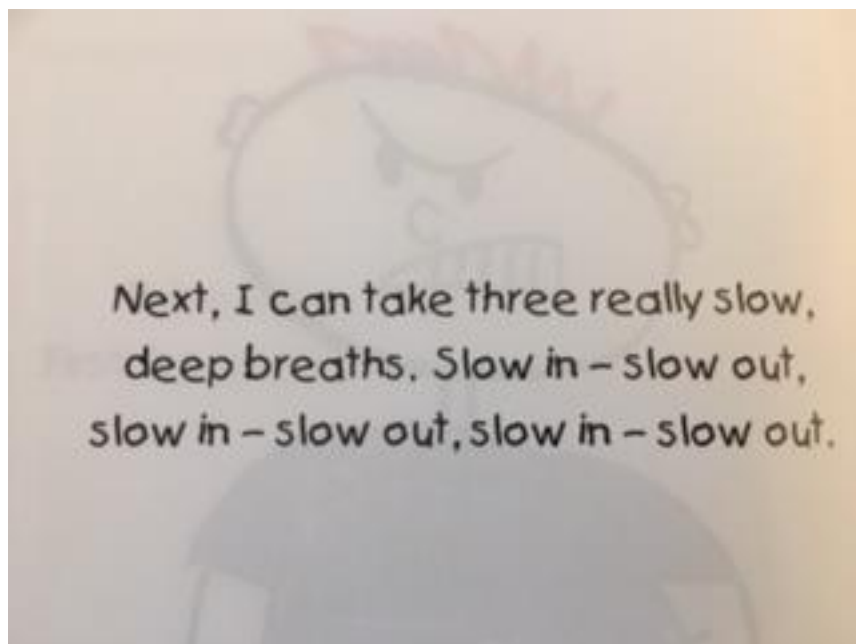




- The book then talks about what to do if you are feeling worried...eg squeezing hands together

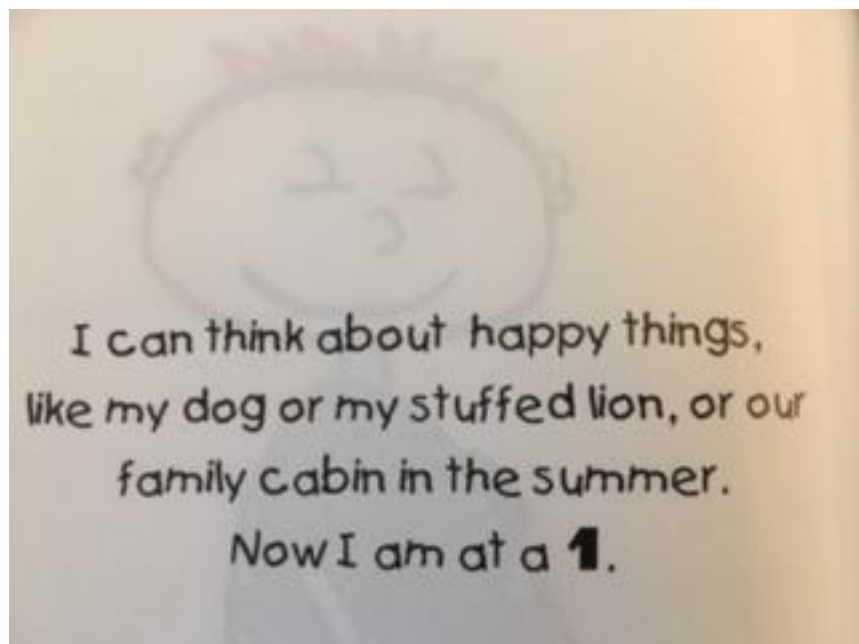


- Controlled breathing



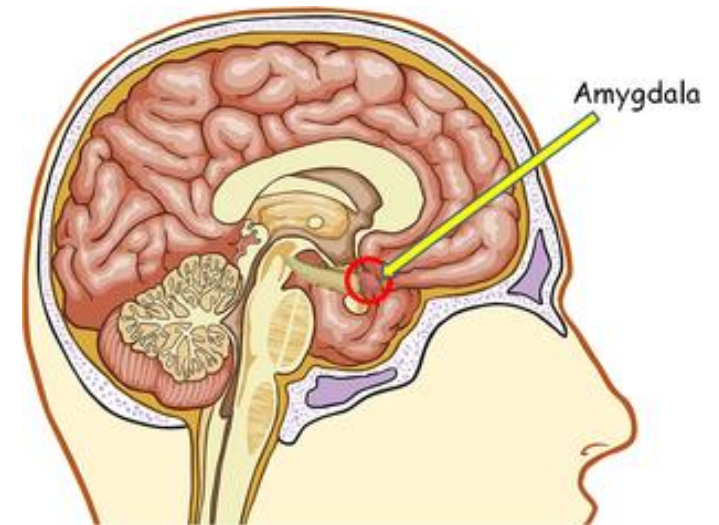


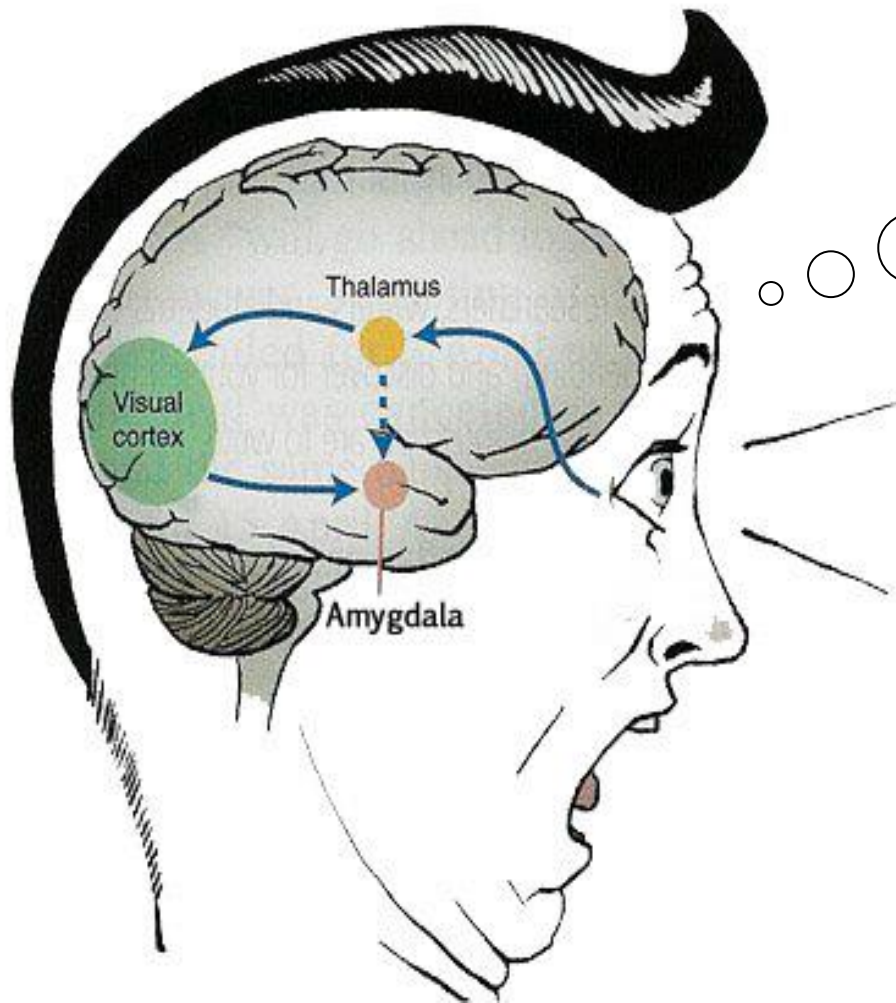
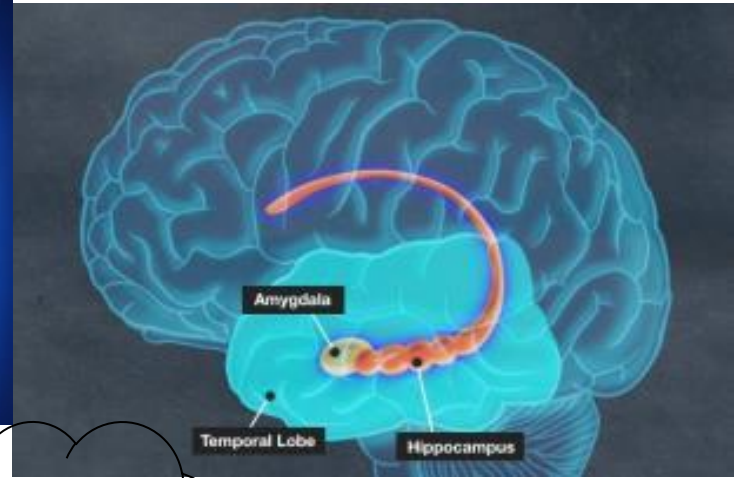
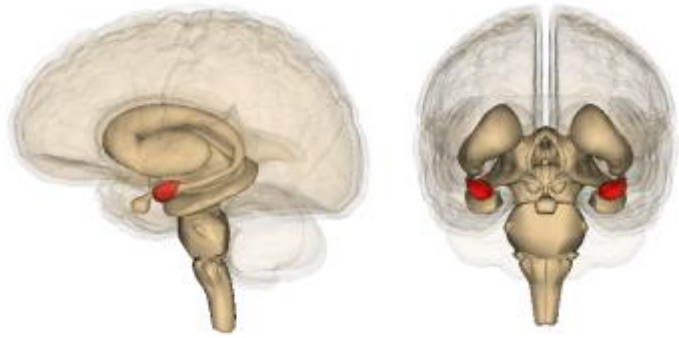
- Use visualisation to calm



# So which part of the brain is doing all this?

- The part of the brain that is doing all this when we feel anxious is called the Amygdala (pronounced uh-mig-duh-luh).





This is not a  
*real* threat



# What can we do to stop our Amygdala warrior taking control?



# Let's give your amygdala warrior a name

- Now that you understand that your anxiety feelings come from the 'amygdala warrior' part of your brain
- You can name your 'amygdala warrior' if you wish?
- Let's find a picture or draw a picture so you can imagine it
- That way we can talk about it and how we can control it

# Making sure you are the boss not your amygdala warrior

- When you are anxious, your amygdala warrior is being the boss when we know that you're really the boss.
- Your amygdala warrior actually thinks it's protecting you,
- ....so what you need to do is let your amygdala warrior know that you've got the problem covered and that it can relax.





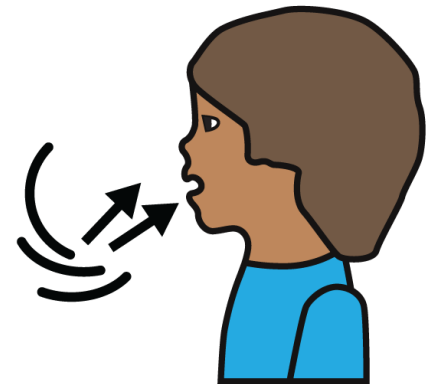
- When you get those anxious feelings, that means your amygdala warrior is taking over, panicking and getting ready to keep you safe.
- It doesn't think about it at all – it just jumps in and goes for it.
- What you need to do is to let your amygdala warrior know that you're okay



# Calming down your amygdala warrior

- The most powerful thing you can do to make yourself the boss of your brain again is to breathe.
- It sounds so simple – and it is.
- Part of the reason you feel as you do is because your breathing has gone from strong, slow and deep to weak, quick and shallow.
- Once your breathing is under control, your amygdala warrior will stop thinking it has to protect you and will settle back down.

**Take deep breath**





# Practising breathing

- Most of the time we don't think about how we are breathing
- But to calm your amygdala warrior you will need to think about your breathing
- Breathe deeply and slowly. Hold your breath just for a second between breathing in and breathing out.
- Place one hand on your chest and one on your tummy
- When you breathe in, see if you can make your tummy rise up a little bit?
- Do this about 5 to 10 times.

# Practising breathing

- Practice breathing before bed every day.
- Remember that your amygdala warrior has been protecting you for your entire life so it might take a little bit of practice to convince your amygdala warrior to relax.
- Keep practicing and after some time, you and your amygdala warrior will be friends – but with you in control.
- One way to practice is by putting your hand on your tummy. If your hand gently and slowly rises up and down, that's great

# Count to 10

- Your amygdala warrior wants to protect you and rushes you into taking action
- But to calm your amygdala warrior down, try counting slowly to 10
- This gives your amygdala warrior time to think about the situation and helps your amygdala warrior realise you are not in danger



# Talk out loud

- An adult might need to know you are upset but you are in control
- Tell the adult how you are feeling



# Distract your amygdala warrior

- Try distracting your amygdala warrior
- You might play with some blu tac to take your amygdala warrior mind off what it thinks is a dangerous situation



# Give your amygdala warrior a drink

- It might help your amygdala warrior calm down if you have a drink of water



# Go somewhere quiet

- It might help your amygdala warrior calm down if you go to a quiet place in your classroom or school
- Talk to your teacher
- Where is the best place to call your “quiet area”?



# Close your eyes

- It might help your amygdala warrior calm down if you close your eyes for a few minutes
- This will help your amygdala warrior by shutting out some of the dangers it thinks are going on





# Praise your amygdala warrior

- When you feel you have calmed your amygdala warrior, give it praise
- Tell it “well done” for listening to you
- Tell it “I calmed you down this time”



# And don't forget

- Your amygdala warrior, is there to protect you
- But when it thinks you are in danger, it is not always right
- You are the boss of your amygdala warrior
- You are the only person who can control your amygdala warrior
- Write down your plan!



# Using visualisation

- Think of somewhere you can picture in your mind where you are very relaxed and happy



- You can close your eyes and think of this happy place when you are stressed



# Using visualisation

- Visualisation can also be used to help some children (takes time and effort):

Eg “picture the situation you feel anxious in... what will you be doing if you are coping?”



# My relaxation book

1. hold the ball in your hand and squeeze tightly. Now let go and relax
2. make a monster face. Now let go relax
3. squeeze the ball with your shoulders. Now let go. Relax
4. squeeze the ball with your knees. Now let go. Relax
5. now hold your breath for a few seconds. Blow out and relax
6. now you're nice and relaxed.

*Taken from Building bridges through sensory integration by Ellen Yack, Paula Aquilla and Shirley Sutton*



# Progressive muscle relaxation

find a quiet place with no distractions

remove your shoes

make yourself comfortable either sitting or lying down

focus on controlled breathing as you relax but don't worry about it whilst doing the tensions of the muscles. In between each muscle group go back to the controlled breathing

gently tense muscles in the face (may wish to shut your eyes) and hold that tense position for a count of about five and slowly relax muscles in the face as you breathe out

# Progressive muscle relaxation

Tense jaw by opening mouth wide then repeat for the muscles on the neck  
repeat for the muscles on the shoulders

Raise shoulders up towards ears

Tense arm (right then left)

Tense fists (right then left)

# Progressive muscle relaxation

Tense stomach muscles then relax

Tense buttocks then relax

Tense legs then relax

Tense feet then relax

Repeat these steps if you wish!



# How to do Controlled breathing

- Place one hand on your tummy
- Slowly breathe in and feel your tummy rise
- Then slowly breathe out so you feel your tummy relax
- Repeat this gently for a couple of minutes

# Controlled breathing

- Breathe - imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out
- Or imagine sniffing a favourite scent, then blowing slowly
- It can help to place one hand on your tummy (if you are breathing in a deeper controlled way your tummy will rise and fall – your diaphragm)
- Some people think of a single word whilst they do this like “calm”
- Some people find it helpful to think of all their stress blowing away with the out breath

# Controlled breathing

There are many ways to do controlled breathing

Find a method that works for you

What is most important is to slow down your breathing and breathe in more deeply

## Calm Down



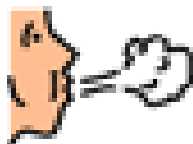
Sit on chair



Feet on floor



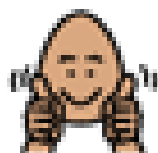
Fold hands



Take 3 deep  
breaths



Count to 10



Good work

# Create portable Relax card

## RELAX

1. Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
  2. Breathe in slowly through your nose, so your diaphragm /tummy moves out.
  3. Pause.
- Repeat five more times.



## Calm Down Checklist



When I am frustrated, angry or upset, I will choose to....

close eyes and count to five



ask for a break



take deep breaths and count to five



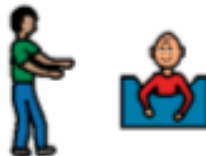
ask to take a walk



ask for a sensory activity



ask for help



Close eyes  
Belly breathing  
Difficult times table  
Use break card  
Ask teacher for help

# Mindfulness tool – body scan

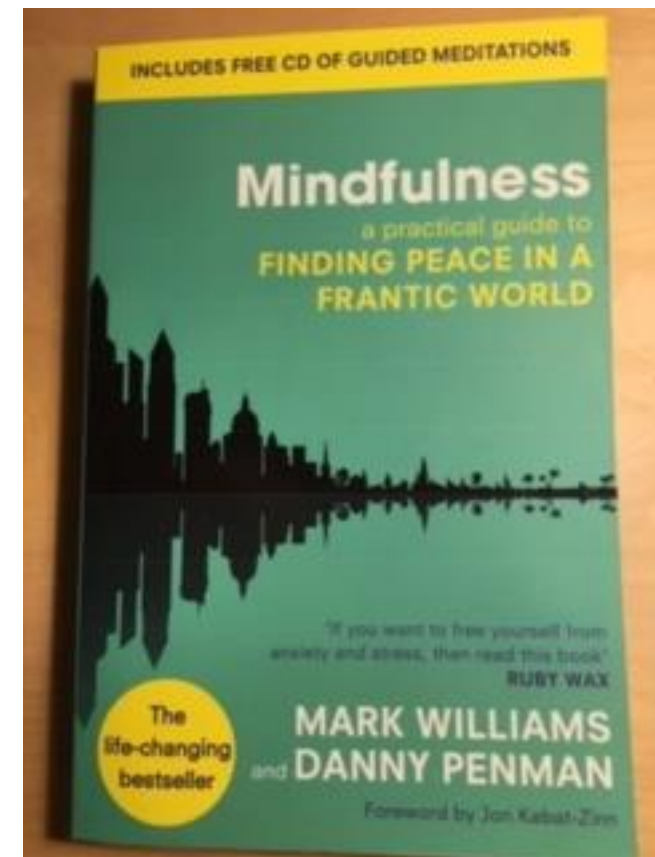
- Start off with controlled breathing
- Focus on one area of the body at a time eg neck, stomach, shoulders, jaw, back (you may wish to concentrate on areas you commonly feel tension in but experiment)
- Go slow
- Notice whatever tension there is in your neck, back, jaw, shoulders, stomach and as you gently breathe out think about releasing the tension from that part of your body

# Relaxation and self help skills

- Need to explain why we do these exercises eg “when you do these exercises, it will make your body feel less anxious... your muscles are feeling more relaxed now”
- Relaxation tools need to be practiced regularly
- Good book for exercises

*Mindfulness - Finding peace in a frantic world*

Mark Williams and Danny Penman





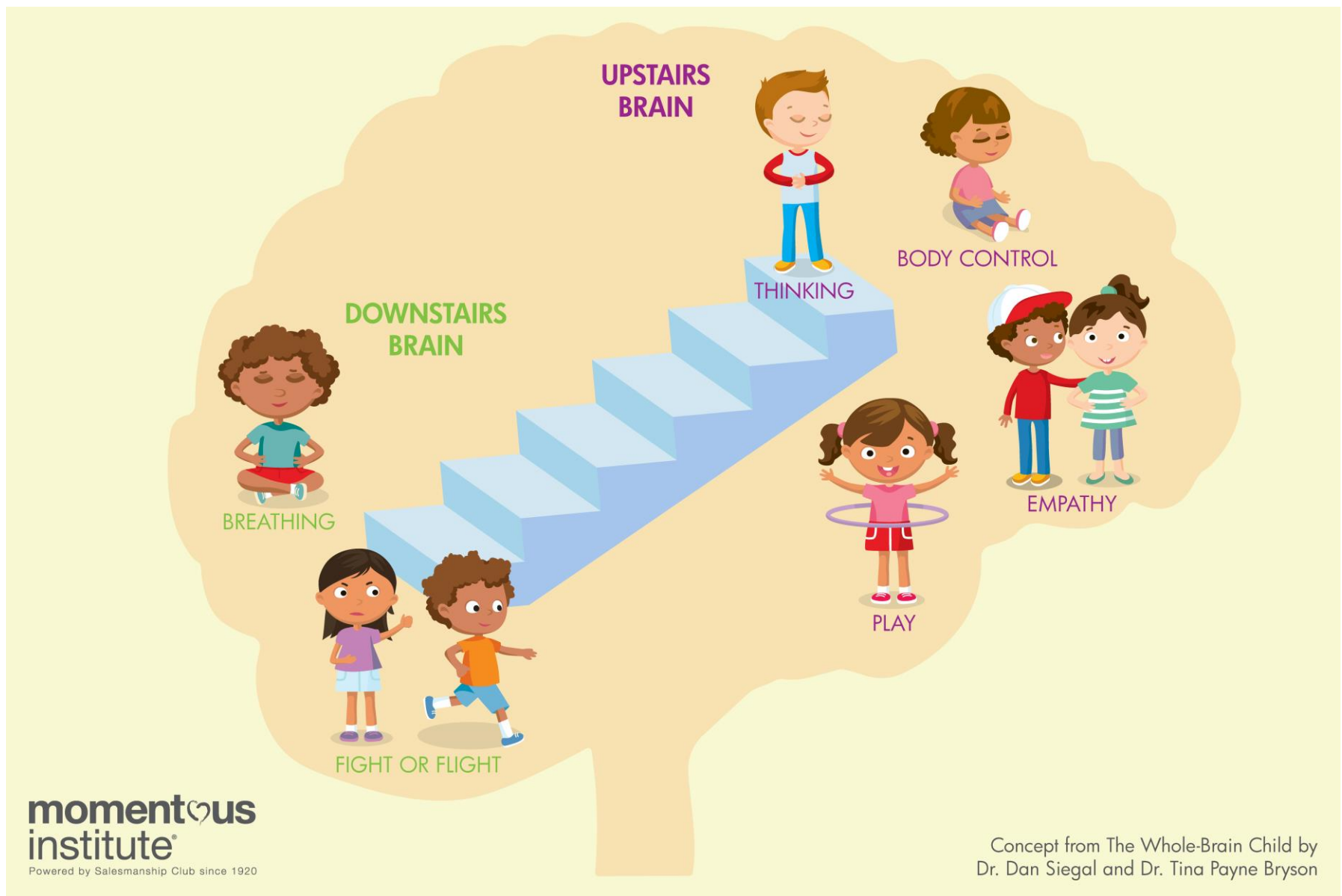
# End of week two

This week we have looked at:

- School based anxiety – tools and the legal framework for support
- Managing worries ideas

Next week

- Using cognitive behaviour therapy tools
- Books, websites and resources
- Where next?



When young people are in the downstairs brain don't try to talk to their upstairs brain- instead immediate response, for example, I see you're stressed/ red/ out of breath. I hear you. I care about you

THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST FRUSTRATING  
THINGS ABOUT HAVING AN ANXIETY DISORDER;  
KNOWING AS YOU'RE FREAKING OUT THAT  
THERE'S NO REASON TO BE FREAKED OUT,  
BUT LACKING THE ABILITY TO SHUT  
THE EMOTION DOWN

