

Healing the anxious mind: techniques that work

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What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an abnormal sense of fear, nervousness, and apprehension about something bad which might happen in the future.



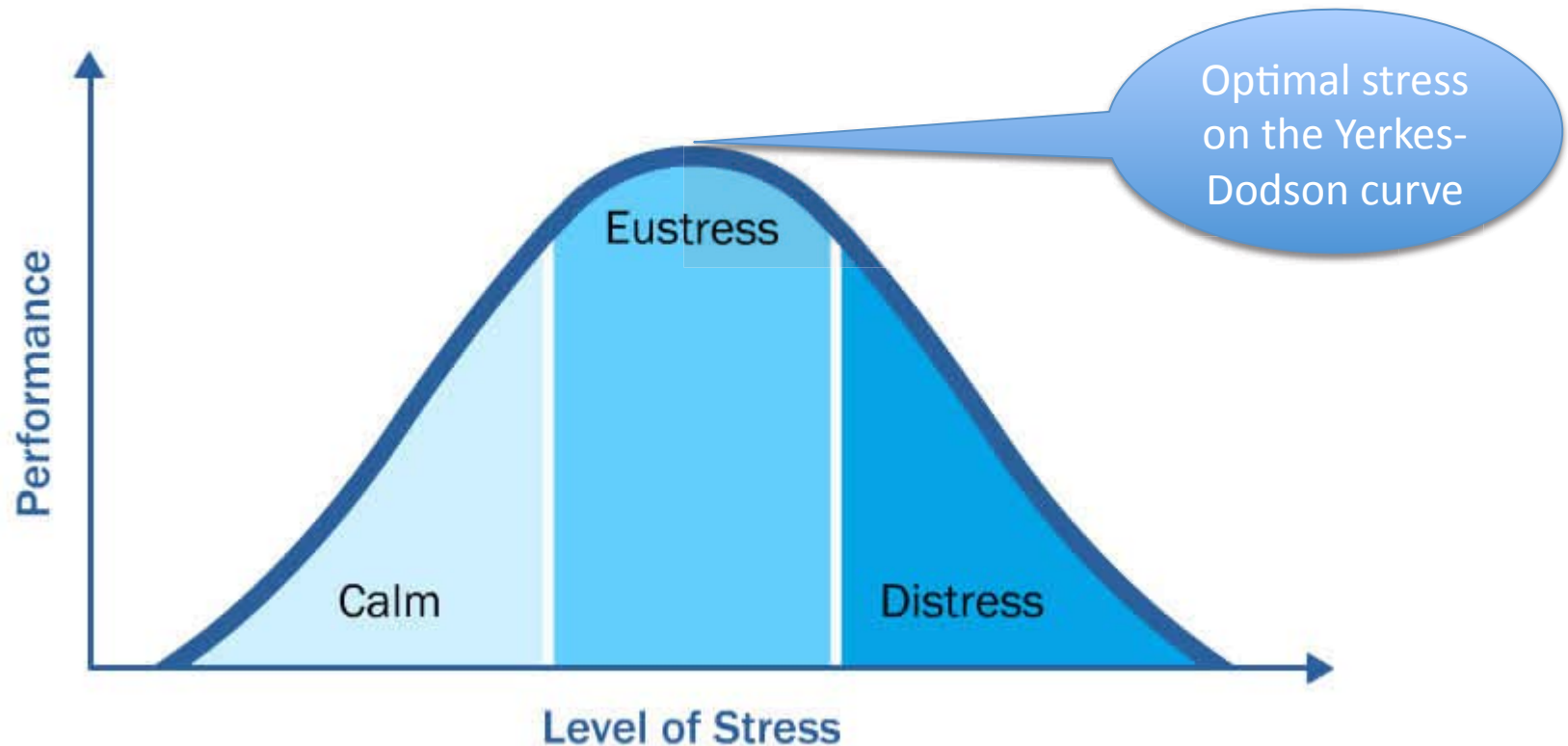
When something is **perceived** as a threat, anxiety can take root

A student will make a subjective evaluation of the degree of threat posed by a situation, and the anxiety response will vary according to this evaluation.



This subjective assessment can change!

Some stress/anxiety/arousal is good



Too much stress and things start to fall apart

Excess anxiety can manifest as an anxiety disorder

Most of us experience some degree of anxiety in our lives, and many of us will have anxiety that spills over into the category of an anxiety disorder.



Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent psychiatric problem in the US

- In a given year 40 million American adults (18%) will have a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder, and many others will experience symptoms of anxiety.
- 28-29% of Americans will suffer a clinically important anxiety-related condition over the course of their life-time.
- In 2013, Americans filled 48 million prescriptions for the drug alprazolam (Xanax).

There's an excellent chance you will work with high-anxiety clients every year.

Anxiety can take root early



Separation Anxiety  Social Anxiety

The CDC estimates that roughly 1.8 million children suffer from clinically serious anxiety, and up to 20% of children have a diagnosable anxiety disorder.

Most prevalent anxiety disorders

- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Specific phobia
- Social anxiety disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Anxious high school students will frequently become anxious college students.

- Anxiety is the primary student complaint in college, outstripping all other concerns¹.
- The 2014 National College Health Assessment found that 54% of all college students report feeling overwhelming anxiety, up from 46.4% in 2010².

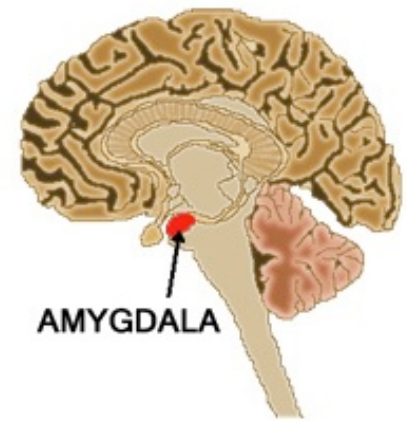


1) University of Michigan's Healthy Minds study of 160,000 US college students.

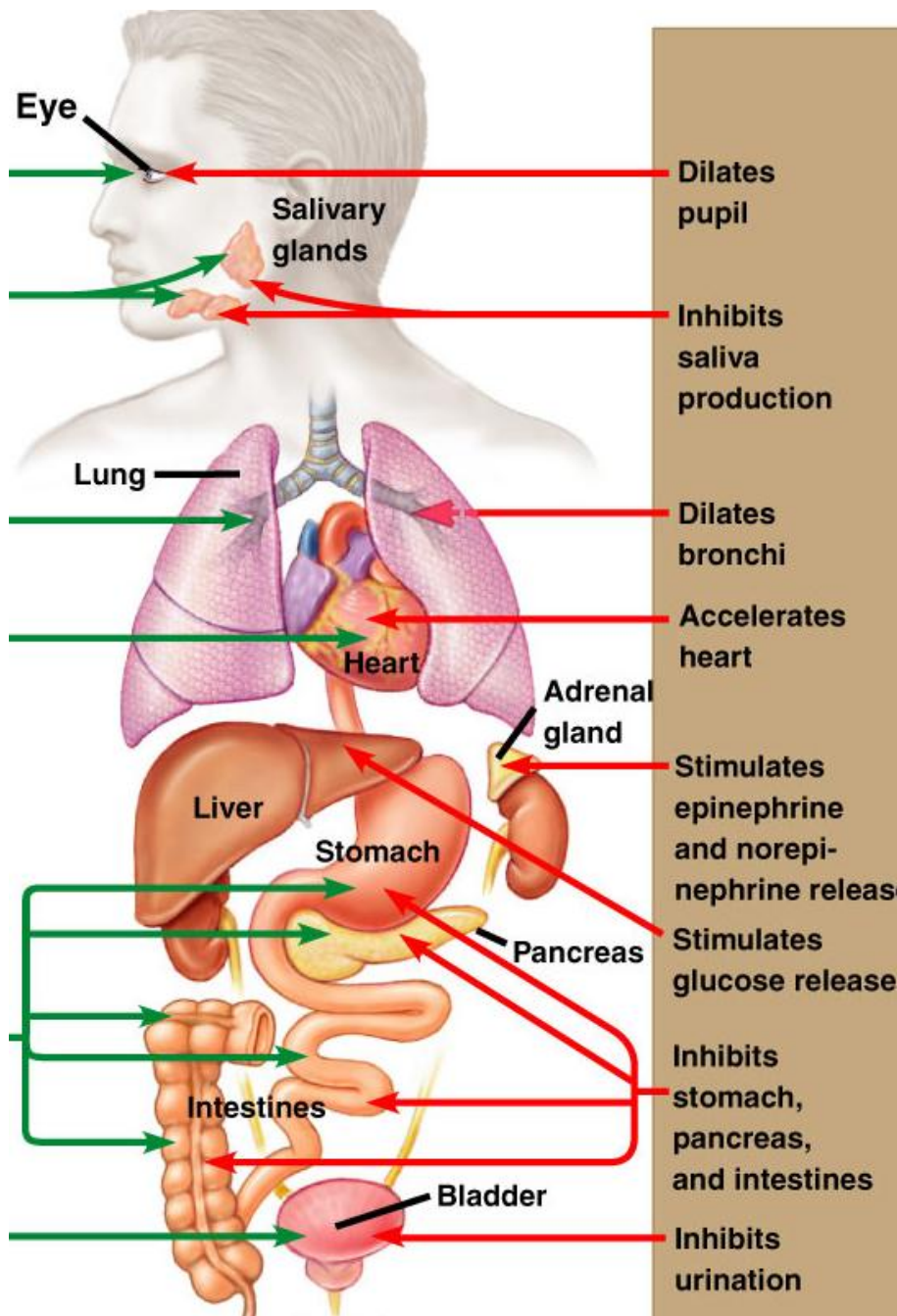
http://healthybodiesstudy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/HMS_national.pdf

2) http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA-II_ReferenceGroup_DataReport_Spring2014.pdf

A quick primer on anxiety



- The almond-shaped amygdala, the brain's center for fear processing, is responsible for identifying threats and preparing us for action.
- The amygdala rallies the conscious attention to threats.
- The amygdala initiates the body's stress response through the activation of the Autonomic Nervous System and the release of stress hormones such as epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol.

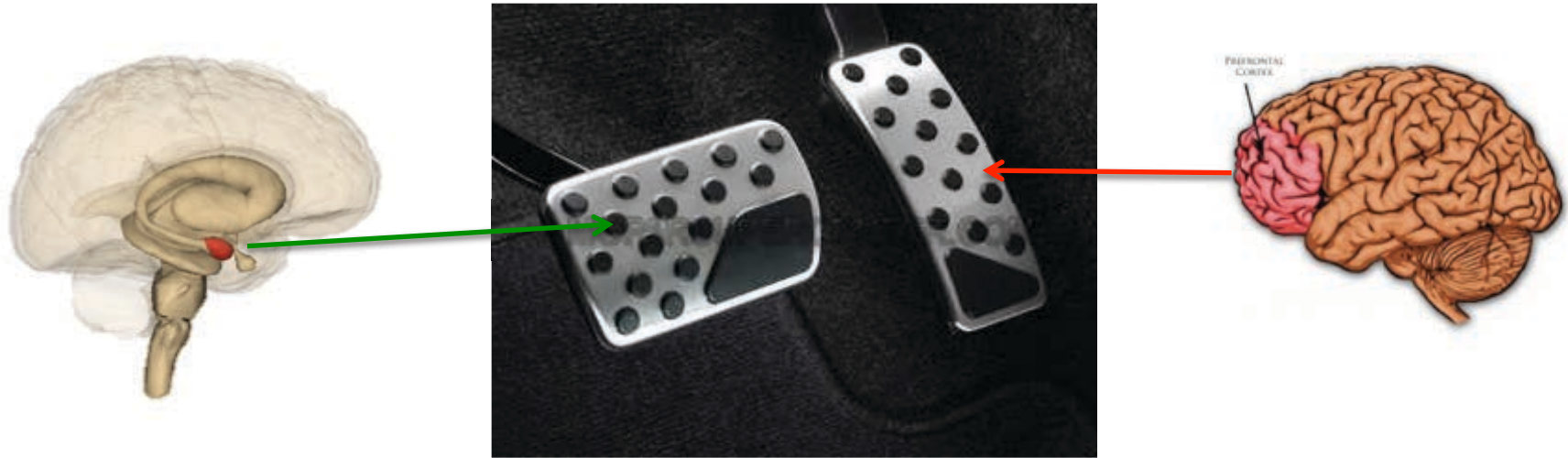


The sympathetic nervous system fires up



The body is getting ready for action: physiological hyper-arousal

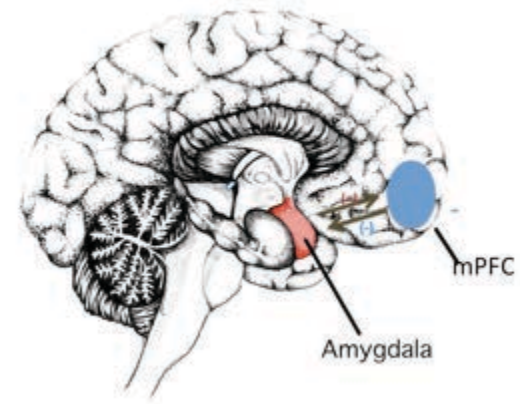
A tale of two brain regions



The amygdala is the initial alarm system, the accelerator of defensive reactions.

The prefrontal cortex is the brake, sending inhibitory signals to the amygdala, quieting anxiety and fear-based emotions.

The prefrontal cortex is the key to emotional regulation



- The connection between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex is necessary to eliminate fearful associations.
- This self-regulatory brain circuitry takes time to fully develop. The prefrontal regions, including the middle areas of the cortex, do not fully mature until well into the mid-twenties.

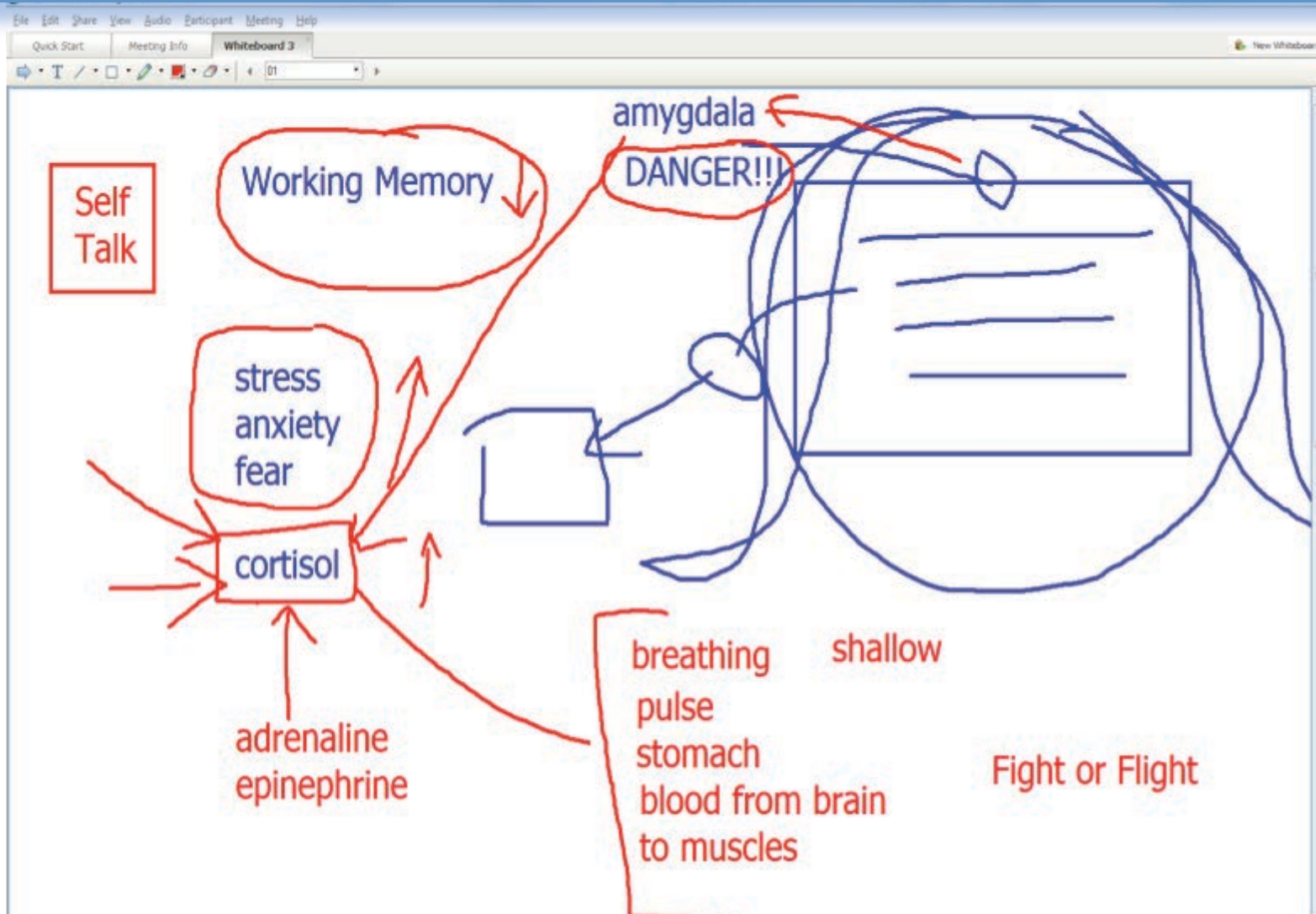
Our ability to regulate fear and other emotions is not fully developed until we are in our mid-30s!

You can explain to your students the basic mechanism of anxiety

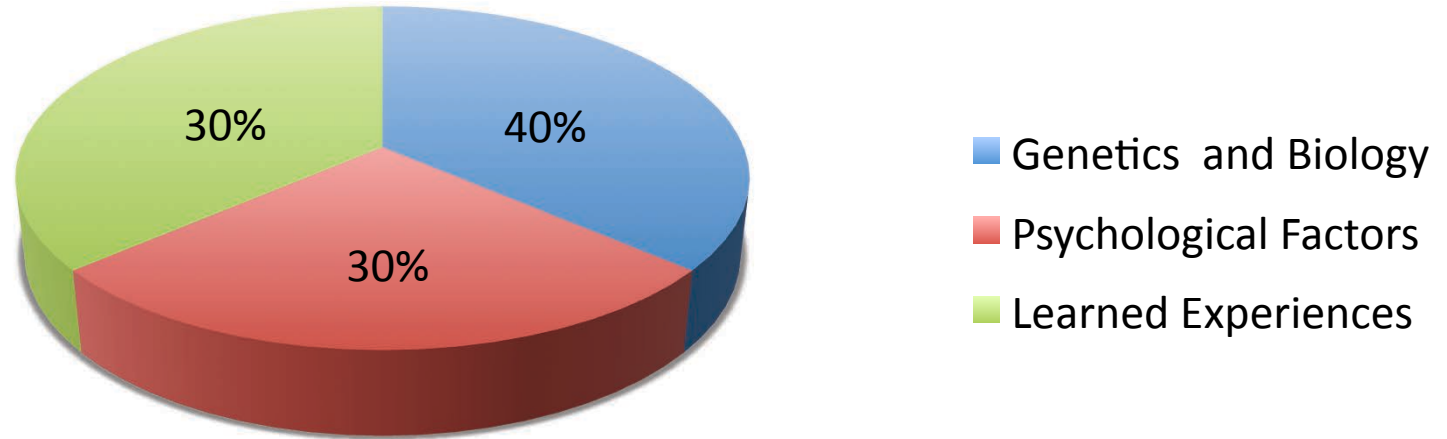


A little neuroscience can help students self-regulate

You can even do this online! Describing the basics



Where does anxiety come from?



- When a parent is diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, the children in the home are up to 7 times more likely to develop an anxiety disorder themselves.
- Up to 65% of children living with an anxious parent meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder.

1) Graph- Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux: *Anxious*

2) Data from Golda Ginsburg and colleagues at Johns Hopkins

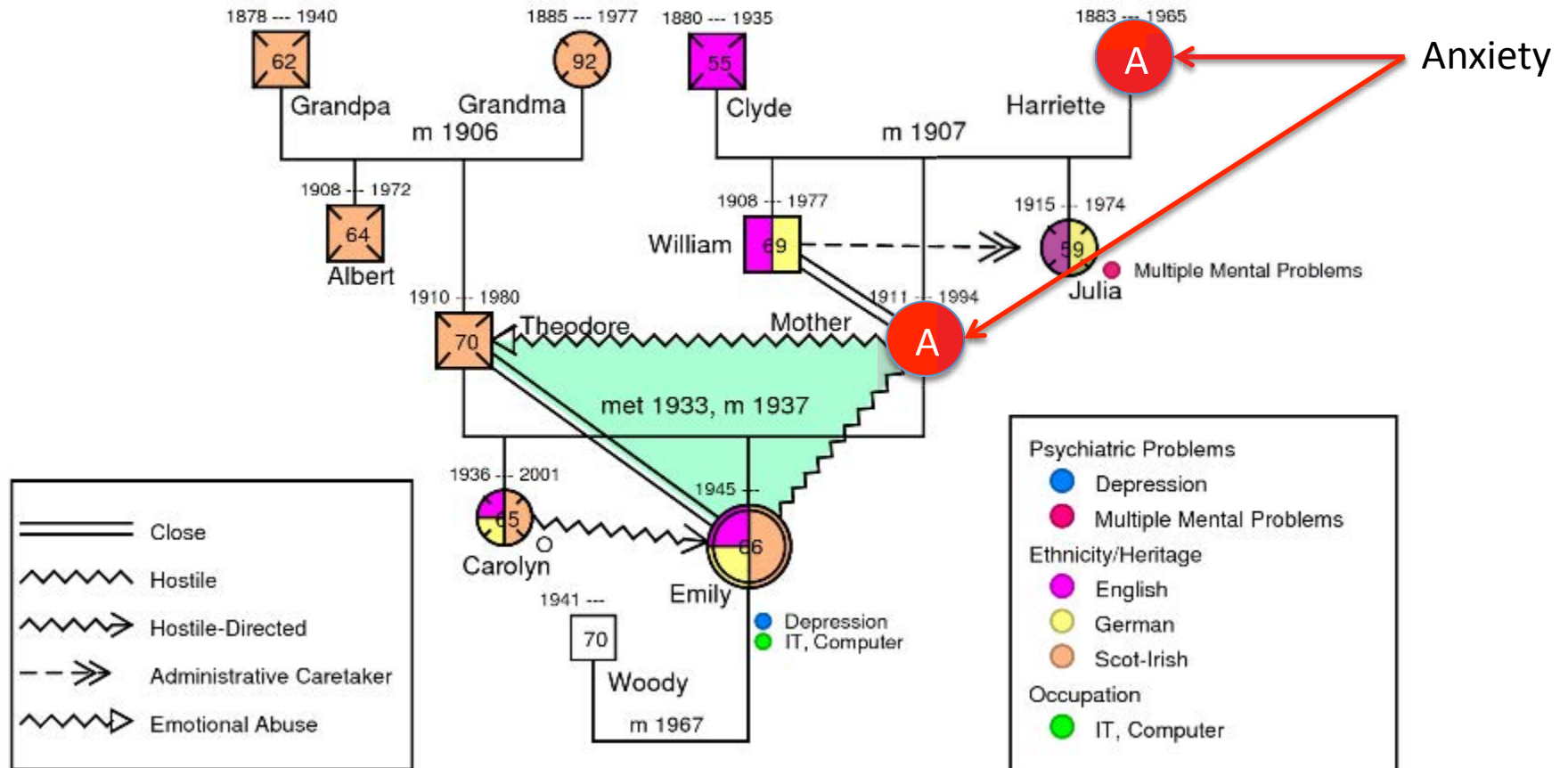
Children learn anxiety from parents

- Children pick up anxious tendencies through observational learning and through instructed conditioning, direct verbal instruction about threats.
- Anxious parents enhance the avoidant tendencies of anxious children.



Anxiety is often a family affair

Emily



It may help to identify the source of your student's anxiety



Whose anxiety is it anyway?

You may need to reduce parental hovering to relieve student anxiety



Negotiate directly with the parents to have them withdraw their attention and decrease the amount of pressure on their child.

Females are more likely to experience anxiety in its many forms



From elementary school onwards, girls display a greater degree of academic anxiety than do boys. From the US to Europe to Africa to Asia, women are twice as likely as men to experience anxiety.

Females have a heightened fear response

- Female brains are more sensitive to CRF (corticotropin-releasing factor): a highly responsive stress trigger.¹
- Females find it harder than males to suppress their fear response in anticipation of danger or pain.¹

Evolutionary biologists have proposed this may allow the female brain to focus on immediate danger and respond more quickly to protect offspring.².

1) Butler, 2005: Columbia University study

2) *The Female Brain*: Louann Brizendine

Affluent children have higher rates of anxiety

- Depression and anxiety are **twice as common** in boys and girls in affluent families*.
- Rates of self-harm are significantly higher in this group.
- Difficulties emerge around 7th grade.
- When children feel that their parents disproportionately value personal success, in terms of grades and achievement, they show elevated symptoms of depression or anxiety.

*This finding may be confounded by differential rates of diagnosis and different levels of access to mental health resources.

(Source: The Problem with Rich Kids- Suniya Luthar- *Psychology Today*)

A contributing factor to anxiety among affluent students is the rampant social comparison within this group

We compare ourselves with each other all the time. We know who made the AP classes and who dropped out because they couldn't keep up. And we know everyone's top choice of colleges.... We never talk about it openly, but we're constantly weighing our own chances of beating them in getting in.



Students will try different techniques to self-regulate their anxiety

- Compulsive behaviors and rituals are used to give students a sense of heightened control.
- Self-harm is a way for some students to attain temporary relief from anxiety or depression through the release of opiate-like chemical messengers, endorphins; this can provide relief from anxiety, racing thoughts, and fluctuating emotions.¹
- An estimated 20% of girls engage in some form of self-harm.
- The average teenage girl is at least 3 times as likely to cut compared with a teenage boy in the same community.
- Nearly one in five students engages in cutting, burning or other forms of self-mutilation.²
- A 2014 study found that 24% of students purposefully injure themselves, up from 21% in 2008.³



- 1) *Girls on the Edge*, Dr. Leonard Sax,
- 2) Eisenberg's 2015 Healthy Minds College Study
- 3) Center for Collegiate Mental Health- PSU

Others will use chemicals to self-regulate

- Drinking has moved from beer to hard liquor, and more students are now drinking to obliterate consciousness.¹
- The Daily Pennsylvanian newspaper reported that 28% of students get blackout drunk at least once or twice a month, and for 24% of students, blacking out is the goal.
- Others turn to marijuana, nicotine, and other substances.



1) *Girls on the Edge*, Dr. Leonard Sax,

Potential anxiety reducing Interventions to consider



Mastery Experiences

Educating about Anxiety

Hypnotherapy



Meditation

Writing about Anxiety



Tapping

CBT Interventions

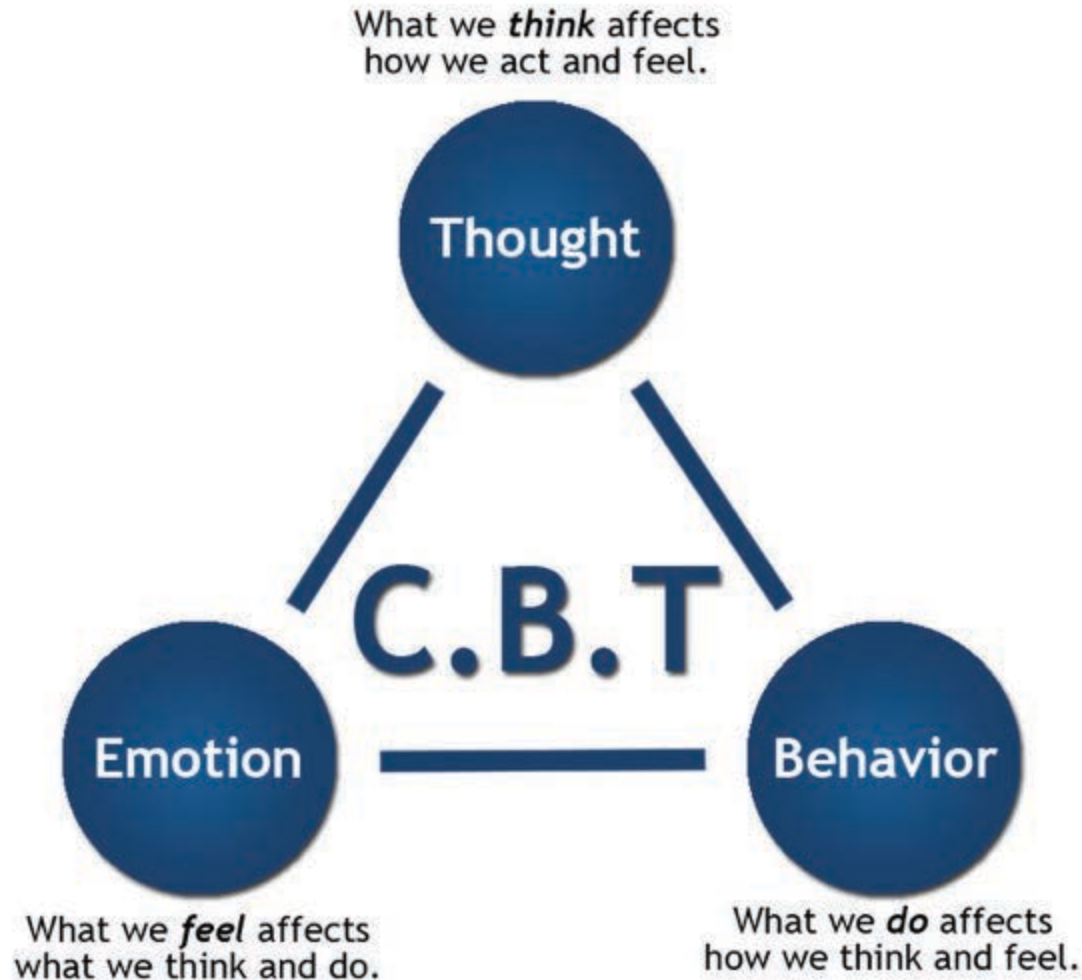
Mindfulness Practice



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is frequently the default treatment for anxiety

- Cognitive behavioral therapy addresses negative patterns and distortions in the way we look at the world and ourselves.
- As IECs, you can lead clients through some of the basic techniques of CBT, picking or adjusting interventions that feel comfortable and appropriate.

Cognitive Behavioral Insights



Adler influenced Dreikurs who influenced Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy. Beck developed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Approach anxiety from a strengths-based perspective

Inventory the self-regulatory skills your student has already developed, likely in non-academic domains

How do you deal with anxiety and maintain concentration during lacrosse?



I always go for a run before games. That helps.



We can use that!

Help your students reframe their anxious, worried perspectives



There are many different, but equally reasonable frames through which one may view a situation. A cognitive reframe does not have to be a rationalization.

Albert Ellis on modifying irrational beliefs

- Beware of **Catastrophizing** and **Awfulizing** statements.
- Keep your **musterbation** to a minimum (i.e., I **must** attain this particular outcome or my life will be over).



Help your students check their extreme, irrational beliefs. If you won't get into Stanford will your life really be over? Will it be a catastrophe? You must be accepted? Let's explore that line of thinking.

Aaron Beck's Trinity of Irrational Beliefs

- I **must** be outstandingly competent, or I'm worthless.
- If people don't treat me considerably and fairly, they are rotten and damnable.
- The world **must** give me more pleasure than pain, or I can't bear it.

All or nothing thinking.
Overgeneralization. We can challenge and help modify these faulty cognitions.



You can help your students correct their distorted beliefs

- What **evidence** are you using to inform this belief? - Frequently students are using insufficient evidence to draw their conclusions.
- Does this belief **always** hold true?
- Has there **ever** been a time in the past when you didn't experience this?

Challenging your student's irrational, anxiety-sustaining beliefs



Everyone at school hates me.

1. Give me a **definition** of “everyone.”
2. Give me an **example**.
3. Give me an **exception**.



This simple 3-phase challenge process can be very helpful. When you focus on exceptions, this pokes holes in the overgeneralization.

Practice challenging irrational beliefs and overgeneralizations



Pair and Share exercise:

One IEC will be the overgeneralizing student.

The other IEC will counter the faulty belief.

Student

I always/never....I have to..... Everybody/
Nobody..... Nothing/Everything.....

1. Give me a definition of _____
2. Give me an example of _____
3. Give me an exception.

Wise IEC

Help normalize anxiety for your clients through appropriate self-disclosure

- Talk about how anxiety shows up for you, and how you might actually expect it to do so in a given context. “I attended that new meeting, and of course I felt somewhat nervous; my hands were a little sweaty, but it was a good meeting.”
- Teach students it’s fine to have some anxiety. Anticipate it. And help them differentiate between normal and toxic levels of anxiety.

Encourage your students to write about their anxiety

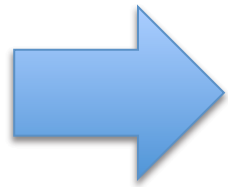
Writing in a journal when you're feeling stressed or anxious is an effective self-regulatory strategy. Re-reading your journal can reveal patterns of thought and behavior.



Writing about test anxiety improves test performance

Expressive
Writing

I'm so nervous about screwing up tomorrow....
Typically I get stuck, then I look around the room.....



Reduced
Rumination

Greater Self-awareness and Metacognition



Enhanced
Performance

The act of writing and crystalizing your thinking can short-circuit circuitous and compulsive rumination. It can terminate the constant looping of anxious thinking. Once the frontal cortex gets involved, and you are thinking about your thinking, calmness can increase.

Simple CBT intervention: Thought replacement or stopping

- You might use a rubber band and snap your wrist each time a compulsive, anxious thought emerges. It may help get you out of a mental loop (a more adaptive form than self-harm).
- Or you might say to yourself, “Stop, Stop, Stop” or “Cancel, Cancel” if distracting thoughts persist.



Alternative CBT intervention: Thought flooding

- Rather than continually pushing an anxious thought away, make some room to experience it fully.
- Schedule a time- i.e., 10 minutes- dedicated to nothing but the worry. Dive in, then process.
- Imagine a fearful scenario all the way to its natural conclusion. Don't stop the thought. See it through.

Repressing a thought can be very hard and energy consuming. Pushing it away can give it fuel. For some, it's better to sit in the fire of that anxious thought and process it.



Teaching your students about the importance of self-talk: inner dialogue

- Anxiety is sustained by inner dialogue. The brain is attending to the messages we communicate to ourselves.
- When your inner critic is serving up a plate of harsh self-criticisms, consider this as simply another mental activity for you to notice.
- You can label these critical thoughts: “judging, judging”, or “doubting, doubting.” Or you can directly counter and challenge the inner critic. “Hey, play nice.” Something to that effect.

Shift **inner** dialogue to supportive first-person “You” statements

Ethan Kross’s research reveals the efficacy of “you” statements

Jennifer, You can do this.
You’ve prepared for this.
You’ve got this.

Establishing the cognitive distance makes all the difference.
Practice self-kindness and compassion with your self-talk.

Externalize the Anxiety Monster: Give it a name

- Personify the worry as a monster outside of yourself and attribute motivation to it.
- Create some cognitive distance from the anxious thoughts. “Oh, Worry Beast, there **you** are again. I knew you were going to show up here!”



By naming the monster, you can help tame the monster, achieving a measure of control over it.

Establish a new relationship with your amygdala: a cognitive reframe

Your amygdala is your friend. Your ancestors survived millions of years of frequently dangerous conditions thanks to this wonderful threat-response system. Be grateful! “Thank you, amygdala!”



Thank your amygdala as it's working

- Cutting a fruit- I see an inner image of slicing my hand: “Thanks, amygdala, I’ll be sure to be careful.”
- Hiking on a precarious section of trail- I’m given a vision of myself falling to my demise: “Thanks, got to be careful, good point!”
- Driving too fast on a wet road- I remember spinning out in high school: “Gotcha, I’ll slow down.”



The amygdala's directive is to keep me safe and alive. And I have come to accept this as part of me.

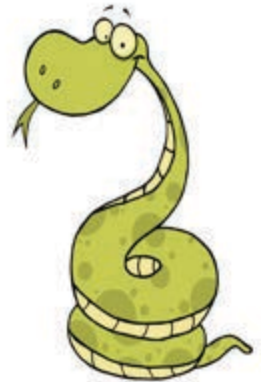
Practice tolerating some discomfort: Increase your distress tolerance

- A conscious willingness to endure unpleasant moods, sensations and emotions can boost your emotional tolerance. Discomfort won't kill you. Unpleasant emotions eventually go away.
- Distress tolerance is a muscle to be developed and strengthened. You may need to learn some techniques to distract yourself until the distress subsides.



Encourage students to face fears in gradually increasing increments: embrace the lowest level of discomfort that can be tolerated and build from there

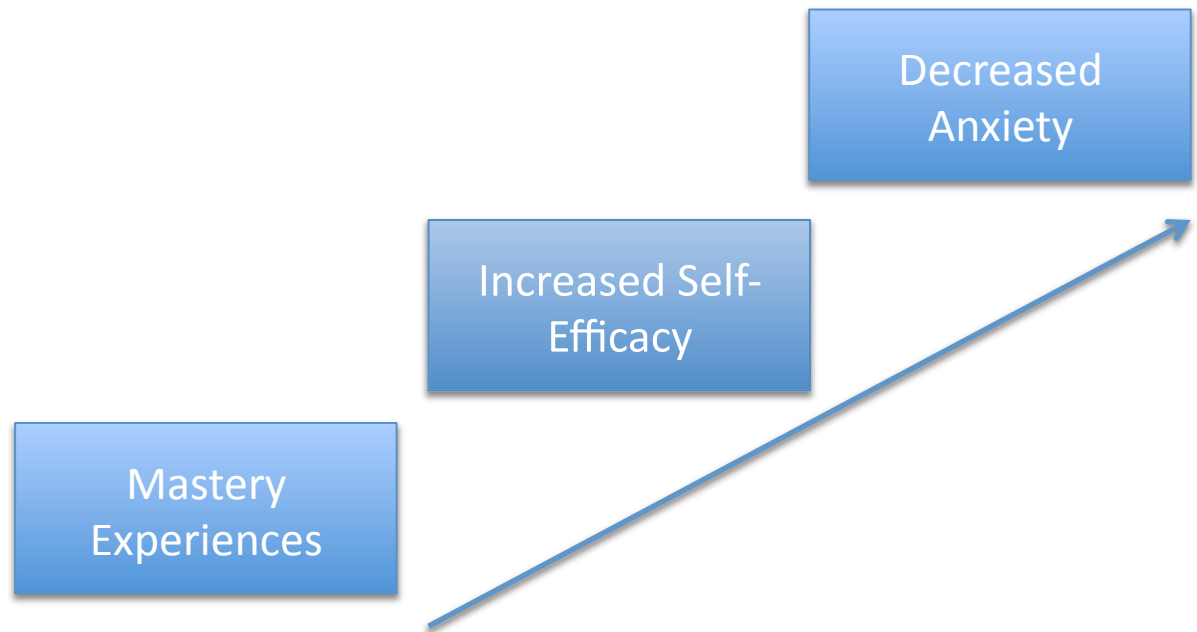
Ex. To overcome a fear of snakes: start off by looking at a picture of a snake. Practice self-calming techniques. Repeat until you are able to achieve a state of calm. Then watch a video of a snake. Then observe a snake safely behind glass. Then watch someone else handle a snake. Gradually increase the level of exposure as you build self-regulatory mastery.



Exposure therapy (systematic desensitization) is a highly effective technique to reduce specific phobias. Baby steps are key!

Mastery experiences drive self-efficacy and decrease anxiety

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



Regulating your breathing decreases anxiety



- When the sympathetic nervous system is aroused, the heart beats quickly and the breath tends to be shallow.
- Deep diaphragmatic breathing is a powerful anxiety-reducing technique because it activates the body's relaxation response. Breathing from the diaphragm, in a slow measured way, filling the stomach then the chest, stimulates the **Vagus nerve**, which controls the parasympathetic (calming) nervous system.
- Stimulating the vagus nerve leads to a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure and other sympathetic responses.

Explicitly teach your students how to breathe deeply and consciously

- Slowly inhale to a count of 4, filling your belly first and then your chest; gently hold your breath to a count of 4, and slowly exhale to a count of 4. Repeat several times.
- Practice deep breathing one minute at a time, 10-15 times per day to increase the likelihood you will access this technique when anxiety spikes.





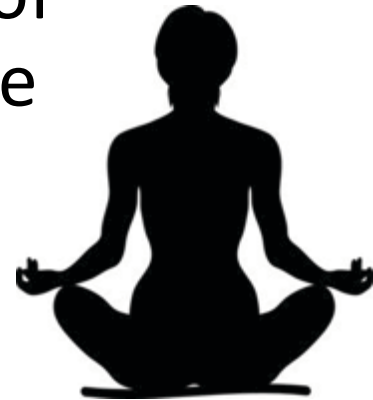
Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness is maintaining attention on present experiences and adopting an attitude characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance. It teaches participants to increase awareness of present-moment experiences, including thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, with a gentle and accepting attitude.¹

1) <http://www.jimhopper.com/pdfs/bishop2004.pdf>

Mindfulness continued

- Observe your thoughts as if you were an outsider- attend to your breath- return to your breath when your mind wanders.
- Recognize your thoughts, feelings, and urges as transient internal events rather than inherent, permanent aspects of the self or accurate representations of reality.
- Research has shown changes in the brain of meditators: middle prefrontal regions were thicker in mindfulness practitioners.



Hakomi mindfulness practice: Tracking your anxiety, allowing it to lead you to deeper insights

If anxiety emerges during mindfulness, sit with it. It will eventually move, shift, take you somewhere: towards a memory, a voice, an image or bodily sensation. Become curious and open. The anxiety can guide you towards insight and healing.



HAKOMI

Using the body to help ground anxiety

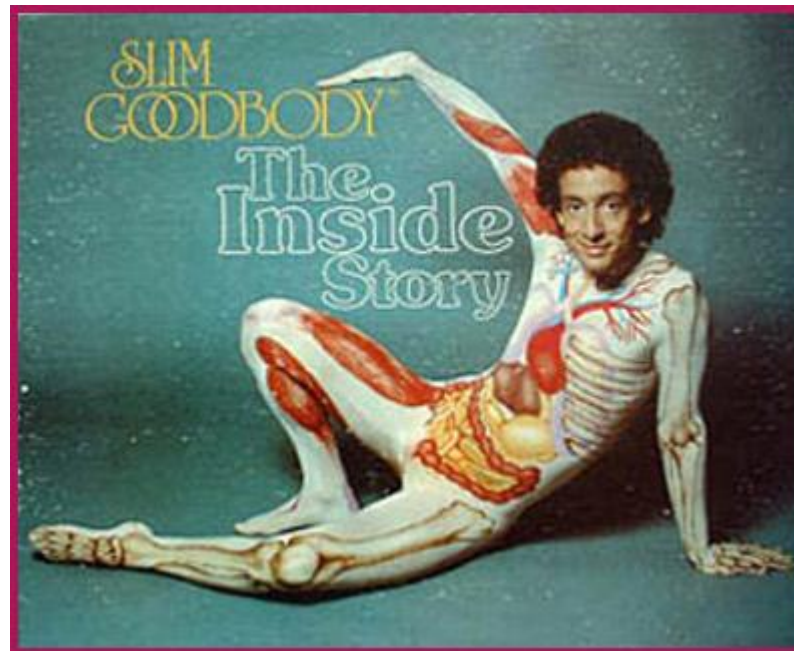
Exercise is a natural anxiety reliever. Research shows that as little as 30 minutes of exercise three to five times a week can provide significant anxiety relief.

Exercise is protective in that it boosts endorphins and neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin, which may reduce symptoms of depression and elevate mood; it also suppresses the release of the stress hormone cortisol.



Holistic relaxation

Teach your students some simple physical stress relief techniques like clenching and unclenching your fists, forced yawning, progressive tensing and relaxing.



Muscle activation and relaxation technique

Tire each muscle, tensing it as hard as possible for up to 10 seconds, before releasing and letting it rest. Progress from your right foot to your left- all the way up the body, one muscle at a time.



Brief mind-body relaxation exercise

- Close your eyes.
- Breathe calmly .
- Count backwards slowly from 5 to 1, clearly visualizing the numbers in sequence.
- Focus your attention on your body .
- Systematically tense and release each muscle from your feet to your head.
- Visualize a relaxing scene while activating all of your senses- feel the textures and the temperature of the scene, the smells, the sounds and the sights.

Sleep is key to reducing anxiety



- Sleep helps to heal the brain, clean out toxins and waste products, process memories and reset the emotions.
- To facilitate sleep, minimize caffeine or other stimulants once evening approaches, shutting off digital stimulation an hour or two before sleeping.
- Engage in quiet activities that help the brain to settle: take a bath, play soothing music, read a book.

Diet can also help regulate anxiety

- Eating regularly and well, balancing the food groups, and avoiding excessive sugar and stimulants can help to stabilize the emotions.
- A diet containing low amounts of omega-3 fatty acids can lead to anxiety and hyperactivity in adolescents—especially in children of parents with similar diets¹



1) Bitá Moghaddam, Ph.D., July 29, 2013 in *Biological Psychiatry*.

Your body's posture affects anxiety!

The brain is listening to the body

The body gives feedback -sends signals- to the mind. Assuming an anxious bodily posture will signal the brain that anxiety has arrived. Neurochemical changes will follow!

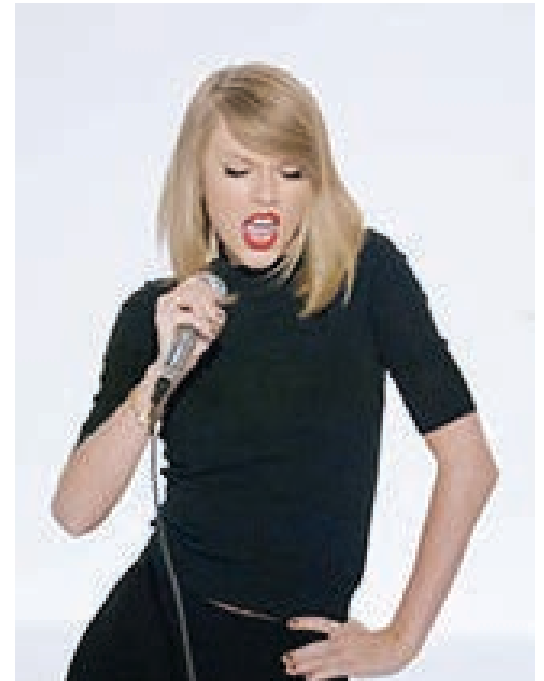


“We do not run from a bear because we are afraid, but instead we are afraid because we run.”

-William James

Learning how to shake it off!

After a confrontation- ducks- and dozens of other animals- shake it off, to physically reset and metabolize all the stress hormones coursing through the body. Don't let that energy sit there: move it on through!



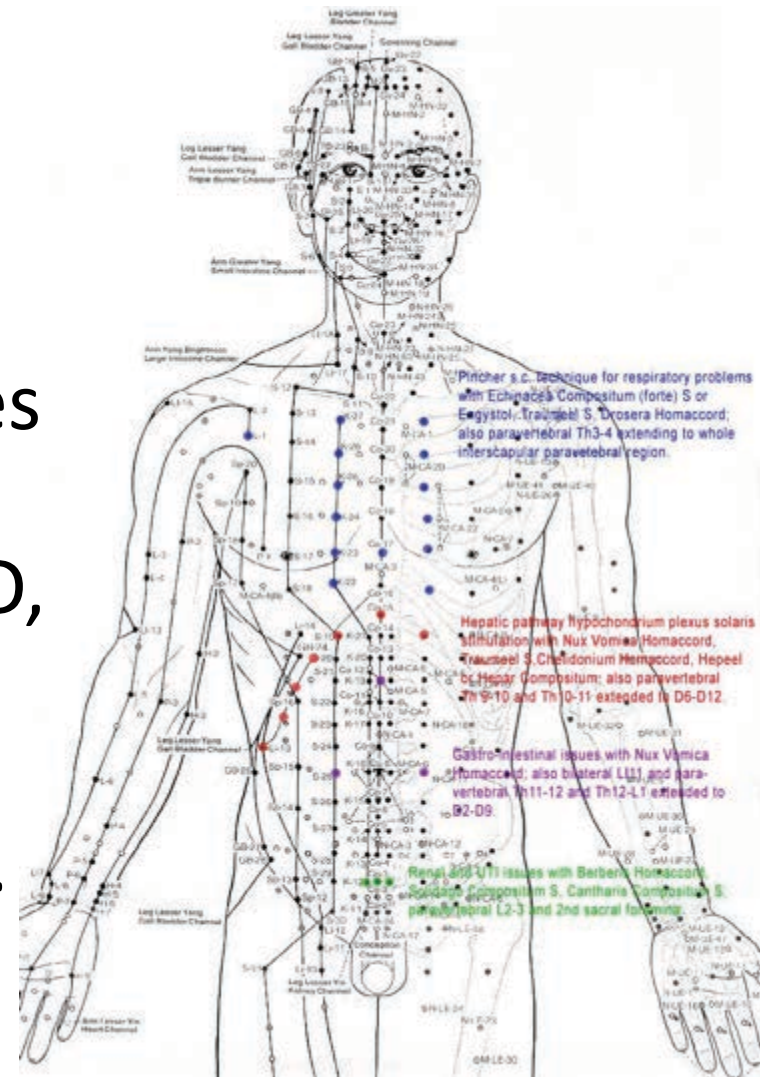
Laughter is one of the best medicines
to relieve anxiety!



Laughter and humor diffuse anxiety, activating the dopamine-pleasure and reward circuitry, suppressing cortisol and stress hormones.

Tapping: Emotional Freedom Technique

- The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is a meridian-based psychological therapy.
- Multiple peer-reviewed studies show that EFT decreases symptoms of anxiety and PTSD, achieving gains above and beyond those achieved by progressive muscle relaxation.



8 steps to EFT



1. Identify your most important issue (**MPI**). Be specific: “I am really scared about where I will get into college.” or “I am really scared I’m going to _____.” or “I’m nervous that I’m not going to _____.”
2. Choose a brief **Reminder phrase** –a couple of words to bring to mind the MPI- speak it out loud at each point with each tap. “This anxiety” or “this nervousness” or “this fear.” You can modify the phrase at each point too.
3. Rate your level of distress on a scale of 1-10.

EFT continued



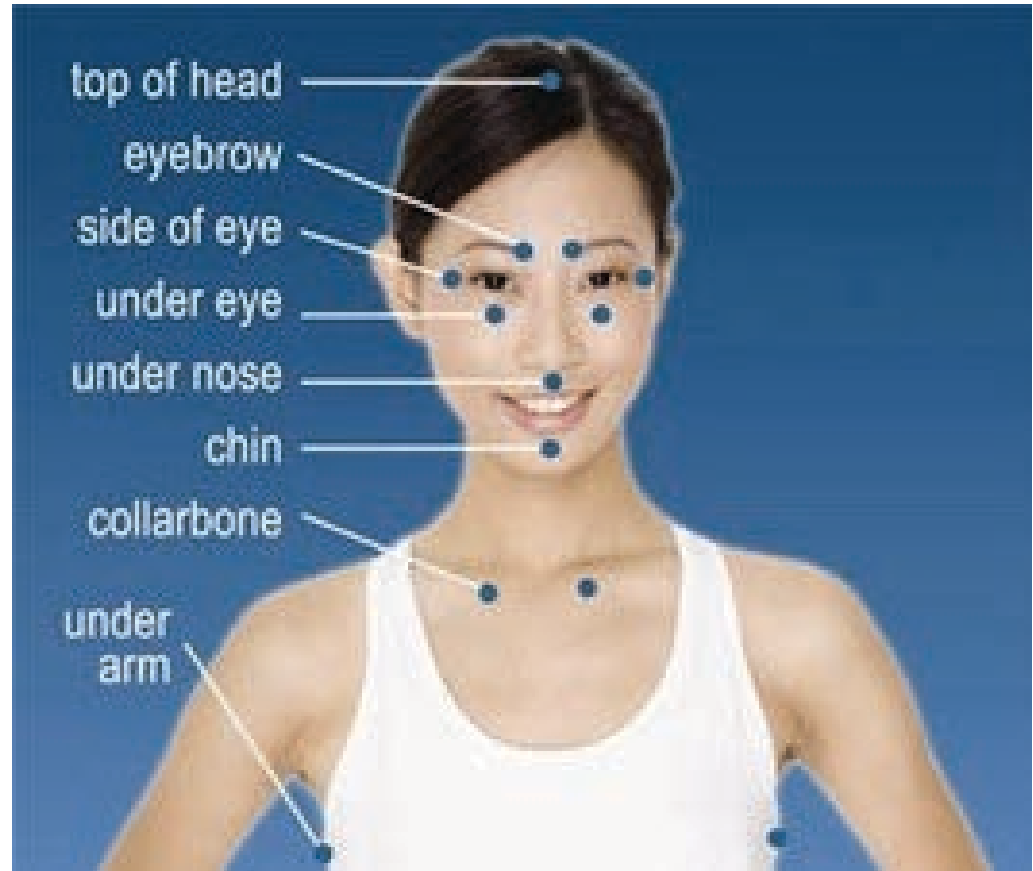
4. Craft a **set-up statement**: “Even though I’m nervous about _____, I deeply and completely accept myself.”
5. Say the set up statement 3 times while tapping the karate chop point.
6. Tap through the 8 EFT points while saying your **reminder phrase** out loud; tap roughly 5 to 7 times at each point. The meridians are bilateral- so you can tap either one- with either hand- or with both hands at once.



Let's all tap the EFT Points



1. Eyebrow
2. Side of eye
3. Under eye
4. Under nose
5. Chin
6. Collarbone
7. Under arm
8. Top of head



EFT continued



7. Take a deep breath
 8. Evaluate the level of stress reduction
- * Repeat as needed



Does anyone feel any different?

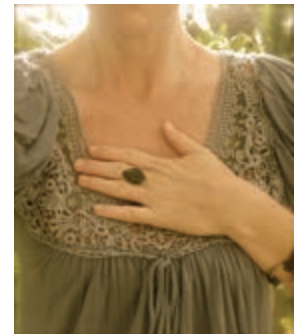
HeartMath



The heart has 40,000 neurons which send info back to the brain. When stressed or anxious, you can consciously shift your mental focus to the heart area and establish a more coherent heart rhythm, thereby increasing the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Freeze Frame: HeartMath exercise

1. Acknowledge you are in a moment of stress/anxiety.
2. Shift your focus from racing thoughts to your heart area. Pretend you're breathing through your heart to help focus your energy there: hold your focus there for 10 seconds or more. You might even put your hand over your heart to deepen the connection.
3. Recall a positive, fun feeling or time you've had in life and try to re-experience it in your mind.
4. Ask your heart, what would be a more efficient response to the stressful situation that would reduce future stress?
5. Listen to that inner voice.
6. Allow your heart and mind to recenter.



Put the phone away! Spend some quality time with yourself



- Cell phones and other wired devices allow us to continually ignore our internal dialogue and avoid time with ourselves. Rather than attend to our thoughts or reflections, we distract ourselves, check our email, go online.
- Sometimes it's not until we finally put down our devices and collapse in bed that our inner voice has time to talk to us.

A healthy inner relationship is key to reducing anxiety

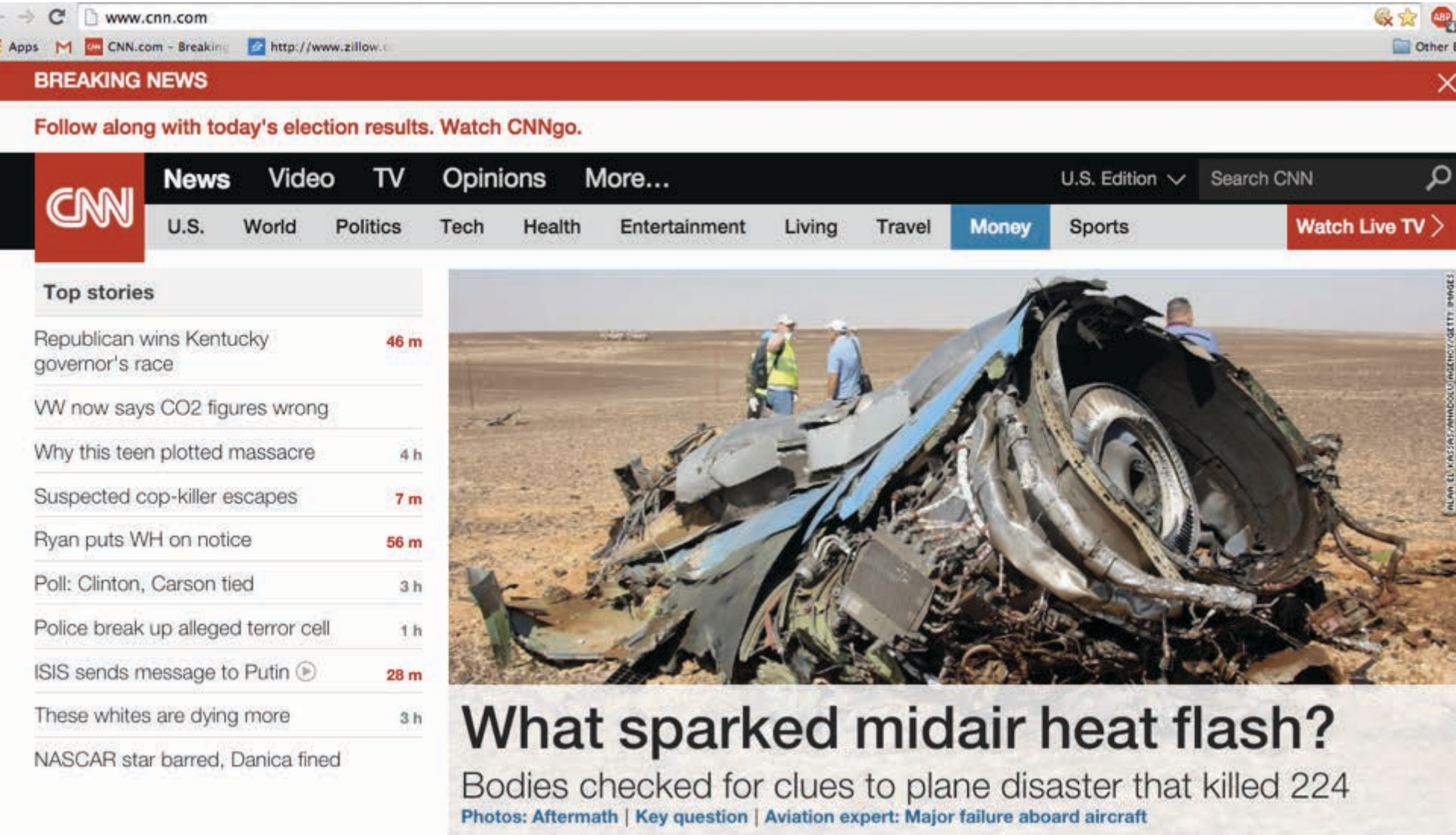
Take a media fast!

- Don't constantly feed the anxiety beast! The amygdala is always on the lookout for threats.
- Fear sells: it keeps you coming back for more. The media wizards know this all too well.
- A media fast is powerful medicine.



I've witnessed my grandma become paralyzed with fear from watching Fox news!

Our news is far from emotionally neutral



The image is a screenshot of the CNN website. At the top, there is a browser address bar showing 'www.cnn.com'. Below that is a red banner with the text 'BREAKING NEWS' and a sub-header 'Follow along with today's election results. Watch CNNgo.' The main navigation bar includes the CNN logo, 'News', 'Video', 'TV', 'Opinions', and 'More...'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with categories: 'U.S.', 'World', 'Politics', 'Tech', 'Health', 'Entertainment', 'Living', 'Travel', 'Money', and 'Sports'. A 'Watch Live TV' button is on the right. On the left side, there is a 'Top stories' list with various headlines and their respective view counts or time since publication. The main content area features a large photograph of a severely damaged aircraft fuselage in a desert landscape, with several people standing nearby. Below the photo is the headline 'What sparked midair heat flash?' and a sub-headline 'Bodies checked for clues to plane disaster that killed 224'. At the bottom of the article preview, there are photo credits: 'Photos: Aftermath | Key question | Aviation expert: Major failure aboard aircraft'.

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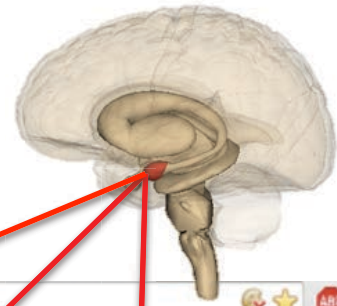
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Top stories

- Republican wins Kentucky governor's race **46 m**
- VW now says CO2 figures wrong
- Why this teen plotted massacre **4 h**
- Suspected cop-killer escapes **7 m**
- Ryan puts WH on notice **56 m**
- Poll: Clinton, Carson tied **3 h**
- Police break up alleged terror cell **1 h**
- ISIS sends message to Putin **28 m**
- These whites are dying more **3 h**
- NASCAR star barred, Danica fined

What sparked midair heat flash?
Bodies checked for clues to plane disaster that killed 224
Photos: Aftermath | Key question | Aviation expert: Major failure aboard aircraft

Fear keeps us coming back for more. New threats at every turn



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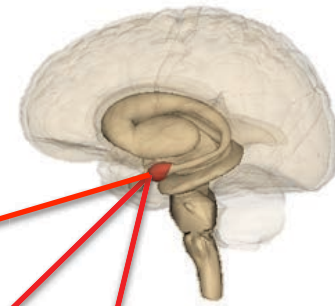
U.S. World Politics Tech Health Entertainment Living Travel **Money** Sports Watch Live TV

Top stories

- Republican wins Kentucky governor's race 15 m
- VW now says CO2 figures wrong
- Why this teen plotted massacre 4 h
- Suspected cop-killer escapes 7 m
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- Poll: Clinton, Carson tied 3 h
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- NASCAR star barred, Danica fined

What sparked midair heat flash?
Bodies checked for clues to plane disaster that killed 224
Photos: Aftermath | Key question | Aviation expert: Major failure aboard aircraft

Fear keeps us coming back for more. New threats at every turn



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Top stories

Source: U.S. intel suggests **bomb**

BREAKING NEWS

Jet may have been brought down by **ISIS bomb**

'Most significant attack since 9/11?' | Cockpit recorder damaged | Baby survives other Russian plane crash

Top stories:

- University: 5 **stabbed** on campus 33 m
- Official: Cop death '**staged** suicide' 57 m
- Mexico allows some legal marijuana 31 m
- Woman **stoned** to death for adultery 3 h
- Ayatollah clarifies '**Death to America**' 2 h
- Aircraft carriers could be ineffective
- This could be the next iPhone
- Poll: Trump, Carson in lead 1 h
- Who could be cut from GOP debate?
- Opinion: Trump **swastika** post is vile 1 h
- Incredibly rare whale seen
- Serena Williams stops **thief**
- Widow: This **killed** Robin Williams



Take a Social Media pause too!



- Facebook is not emotionally healthy for passive users¹.
- Social media can enhance anxiety through an obsessive focus on self-presentation, self-evaluation and external comparison.
- “Performing a self” online, cultivating a “perfect” image and persona, concealing weaknesses or failures, can undermine a person’s authentic inner relationship and lead to a more fragile and anxious inner life².

1) <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0069841>

2) Dr. Sax- *Girls on the Edge*.

Ground yourself in nature and decrease your anxiety

- Teenagers exposed to water fountain sounds at the dentist's office experienced reductions in anxiety levels!
- I pull weeds and get dirt under my finger nails to regulate my anxiety.



Ground yourself through human connections

- Relationships and human connections can dampen your biological response to stress. On a biological level, social ties stimulate the release of the hormone oxytocin, known to reduce anxiety and fear, in part by limiting the cortisol response to stress.
- Oxytocin shows promise in treating anxiety disorders, making the amygdala less reactive to fearful stimuli.¹



Social Interest is key to psychological health



belongingness, connection, giving back and contributing to others leads to better health, lower rates of anxiety and depression.

Depressed or anxious students may benefit from connecting with others, giving back to others, attending to the needs of others to escape swimming in the sea of self.

Touch diminishes anxiety



Affective or emotional touch- loving caresses like a mother gives her child- form the neurobiological foundations of attachment, stimulate oxytocin and decrease anxiety.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24853935->

<http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/32487/title/Pleasant-to-the-Touch/>

Our mammal friends know the anxiety-reducing power of touch

- Grooming in other primate species lowers cortisol levels.¹
- Rat mothers that lick and groom their babies more often raise less stress-prone pups that go on to be better parents themselves.²



1) Sapolsky: *A Primate's Memoire* 2) Robin Dunbar- U. Oxford and Michael Meaney of McGill

Touch heals



- Petting dogs and cats also drops stress levels.¹
- We touch ourselves unconsciously throughout the day to self-soothe in times of stress.



1) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3408111/>

Even a stranger's hand will help reduce anxiety and stress

Researchers used fMRI scans to see the brain's response to electric shock in three conditions:

1) holding a spouse's hand 2) holding a stranger's hand and 3) holding no hand. When holding any hand, stress attenuated. With a familiar touch, the emotional brain more readily quieted.

“When someone familiar touches you, it's like magic. Calm washes over the whole brain.”



Use other senses to calm the mind

- One therapeutic client used the smell of vanilla throughout her house and everywhere in her life. She wasn't sure why she did it.
- Eventually she made the connection that the smell of vanilla evoked the smell of the cookies her mother had made during her early childhood.

Specific fragrances, colors, music can all help alleviate anxiety



Use centering physical objects



Having a centering stone or other grounding device can help regulate anxiety levels

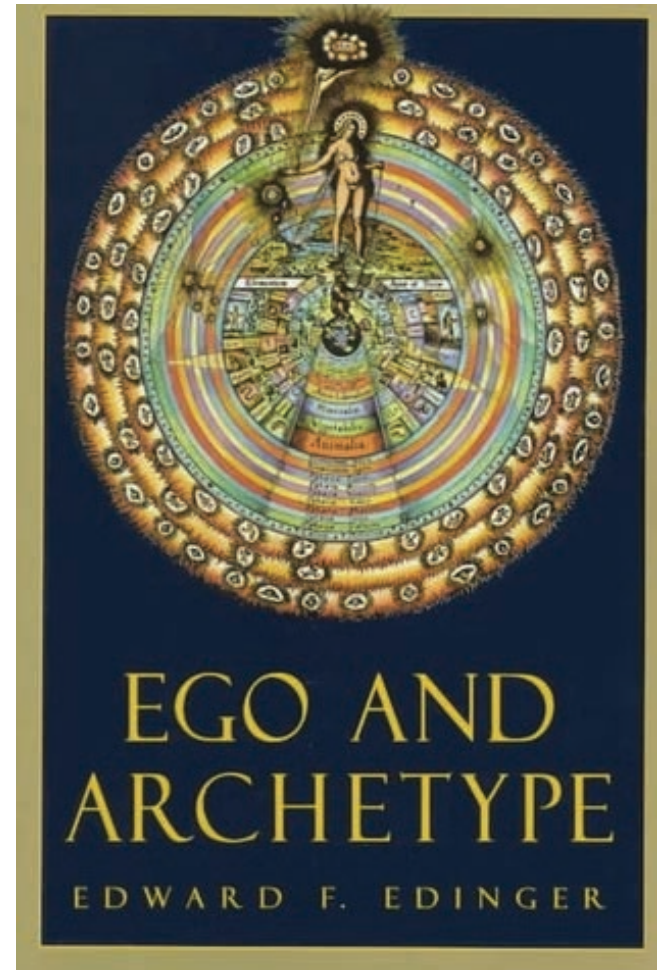
Use centering mental images or wisdom figures

- Carl Jung explored the grounding effects of archetypal centering figures.
- Inner spiritual and religious figures can help us to recenter and ground anxiety.
- Even an imagined shape can help center one's energies (I imagine an inner pyramid in times of turmoil).



Aligning the self with something greater

By subordinating the little “s” self, the small ego, to something greater, the big “S” Self or some higher power (e.g., Jesus, the Buddha, the inner King), the ego enters into proper alignment and anxiety is diminished.



Anxiety as a spiritual construct:
Letting go of the illusion of control can
help decrease anxiety



Centering the self: high-level thoughts

- Our ancestors had centering technologies that we've lost. Singing, chanting, being close to the earth, and the community. Intimacy. Touch. Love. Nature. Animals. These help ground our fragile self. We are becoming a more detached, disembodied, disconnected society. Thus anxiety is on the rise.
- The self that is deeply grounded is protected from anxiety. Self-love and acceptance guard against anxiety. We must move beyond the culture of performance and the need for external validation if we are to transcend anxiety.



Ground yourself and your energies to help better serve your anxious clients

- Do your inner work, your own centering work, to show up to your external work centered and anchored.
- Listen with compassion and heart.
- Make your office a nurturing space.
- Help your clients down-regulate if they are ratcheted up on anxiety. Pause. Slow things down. Set the tempo. Make them drop into your rhythm, particularly if you sense they are in an anxious place.

Try some of these techniques with yourself and with your clients!

Practice a few of these techniques- maybe mindfulness, or tapping, or deep breathing, a media fast, spending more time in nature, getting to know your amygdala and your prefrontal cortex, expressive journal writing, invoking a centering interior image, or petting your neighbor's dog.

As you expand your personal toolkit for anxiety reduction you'll be more useful to more of your students, and more centered in your own skin!

Discussion



applerouth