



STRESS AND ANXIETY IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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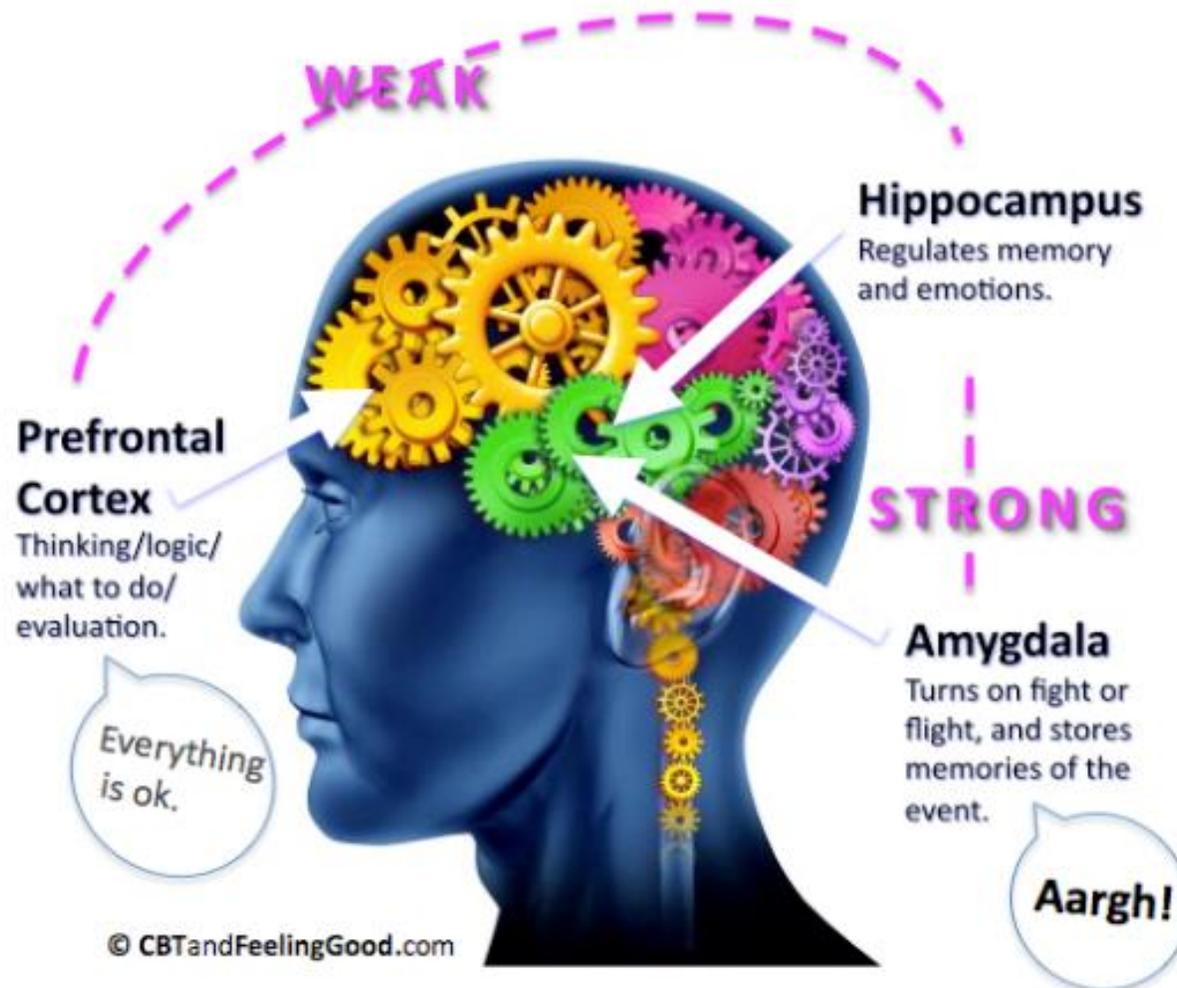
NEBRASKA MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS

# STRESS and ANXIETY

# WHAT IS STRESS?

- ▶ Stress is your brain's reaction to perceiving threat.
  - ▶ External or internal threat
  - ▶ In most situations, there is no real threat
- ▶ The Amygdala Detects "Threat"
  - ▶ Involved in detecting and learning what parts of our environment are important and have emotional significance.
  - ▶ Critical for the productions of emotions, particularly negative emotions.
  - ▶ Instantaneous Threat Appraisal:
    - ▶ Safe vs. Dangerous
    - ▶ Pleasant vs. Unpleasant

# The Stress Response



# The Effects of Long-Term Stress

## How **STRESS** Affects

## The **BODY**

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### **SKIN**

skin problems like acne, psoriasis, eczema, dermatitis, random breakouts, and skin rashes

### **STOMACH**

can cause peptic ulcer disease, IBD, IBS, food allergies, stomach cramps, reflux, nausea and weight fluctuations

### **PANCREAS**

results in elevated secretions of insulin, which if chronic could lead to diabetes, damaged arteries and obesity

### **IMMUNE SYSTEM**

suppressed effectiveness of the immune system to battle and recover from illness. Leads to high levels of inflammation in the body, which causes a variety of chronic health conditions

### **HEAD**

issues with mood, anger, depression, irritability, lack of energy, concentration problems, anxiety and panic attacks

### **HEART**

increased blood pressure, fast heart beat, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, and higher cholesterol

### **INTESTINES**

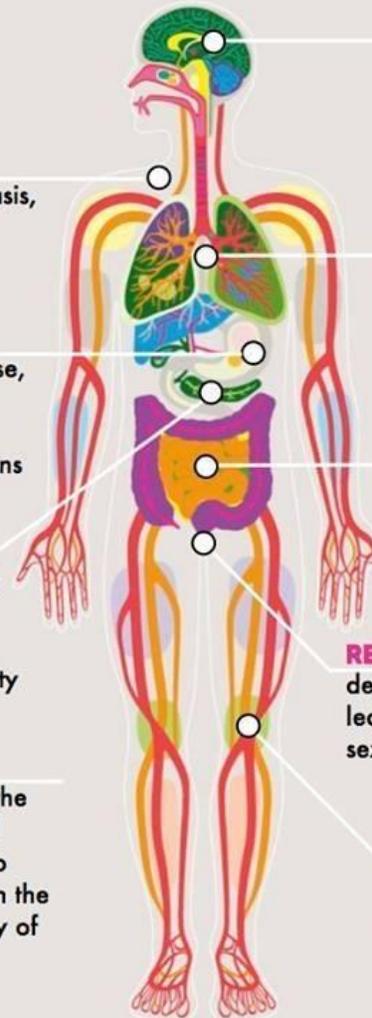
decreased nutrient absorption, reduced metabolism, decreased enzymatic output, increased risk for inflammatory bowel diseases, diabetes, and more

### **REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM**

decreased testosterone and estradiol production leading to reduced fertility. Dampening of sexual behaviour and loss of sexual drive

### **JOINTS & MUSCLES**

aches and pains, inflammation, tension, lowered bone density (propensity for osteoporosis), tightness in the shoulders and back





Without Stress Management . . .

we have ANXIETY!!!

# What is anxiety?

- ▶ At least 6 months of "excessive anxiety and worry" about a variety of events and situations. The symptoms cause "clinically significant distress" or problems functioning in daily life.
- ▶ There is significant difficulty in controlling the anxiety and worry.
- ▶ The presence for most days over the previous six months of 3 or more (only 1 for children) of the following symptoms:
  - ▶ Feeling wound-up, tense, or restless
  - ▶ Easily becoming fatigued or worn-out
  - ▶ Concentration problems
  - ▶ Irritability
  - ▶ Significant tension in muscles
  - ▶ Difficulty with sleep

# Anxiety

- ▶ Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18% of the population.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders affect one in eight children.
  - ▶ Research shows that untreated children with anxiety disorders are at higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse.
  - ▶ Anxiety is as common among older adults as among the young.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders also often co-occur with other disorders such as depression, eating disorders, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- ▶ Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only about one-third of those suffering receive treatment.

# Effects of Social Media on Teens

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EFHbruKEmw>

# HOW TO BUILD COPING: RESILIENCE!!

- ▶ What is resilience?
  - ▶ Preparedness
  - ▶ Psychological Toughness
  - ▶ Successful Coping
  - ▶ Recover, adjust and growth
  - ▶ Function of the Prefrontal Cortex – Remember our Brain?
    - ▶ Sends inhibitory signals to the amygdala
    - ▶ Located in the left side of the prefrontal cortex

*We Cannot be Happy and Stressed at the same time!!*

# Understanding Stress Resilience

- ▶ Stress-Resilient Mindset

Viewing stressors as challenges rather than as threats by turning off the adrenal “fight-or-flight” response and the cortisol “worry” response.

- ▶ Stress-Resilient Brain

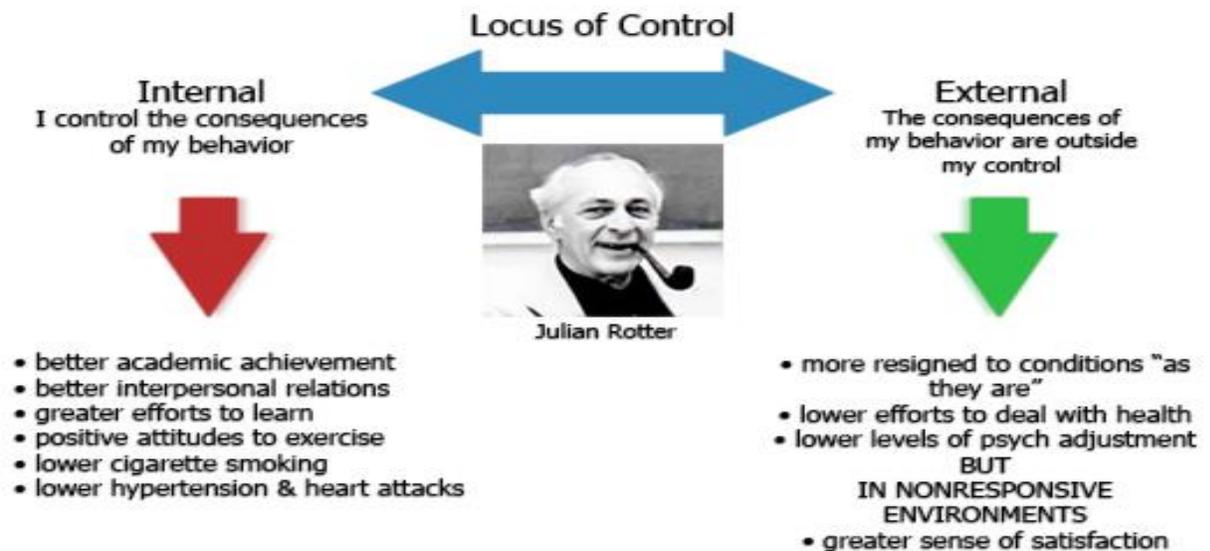
Protecting short-term memory and the hippocampus; reducing emotional threats and the amygdala; preventing confusion, anxiety and mood swings and the prefrontal cortex.

- ▶ Stress-Resilient Body

Preventing immune suppression, chronic inflammation, and metabolic syndrome.

# The Stress-Resilient Mindset

- ▶ Stress resilient people view problems as predictable and controllable
- ▶ Protection against the toxic effects of cortisol on the heart, immune system, and the brain
  - ▶ Internal Locus of Control vs. External Locus of Control



# So, what can you do? Environmental strategies

- ▶ **Create a “safe” place for the child to go when anxiety symptoms are high or during stressful times.**
- ▶ **Post the daily routine in the classroom and let students know in advance any changes in the schedule.** For younger children have visual aide to help indicate change.
- ▶ **Allow a few minutes at the beginning of the day for the child to transition into the school day.** If the time before school is difficult for the child, it may be beneficial for them to either enter the classroom a few minutes before or a few minutes.
- ▶ **Additional transitional periods might be necessary for other times when routine is disrupted.** This can be providing five to ten minutes for the child to prepare their papers and school supplies or simply a few minutes for the child to sit quietly before the school day begins.
- ▶ **For children avoiding school because of anxiety or depression, offer suggestions such as coming to school for a shorter day.** The longer the child avoids going to school, the more difficult it is for them to return. Shorter school days beginning with periods of enjoyed time and as they are successful or master fears increase the amount of time in structured and step wise manner.
- ▶ **Use small group activities throughout the day.** Have the class break into small groups to complete class work to encourage participation.

# Environmental cont'd....

- ▶ **Play soothing music during down time.** Allow structured time or access to music as needed, can use check out/check in strategies.
- ▶ **Incorporate exercise and mindfulness strategies into the school day.** These can be at the desk, standing to stretch or wiggle breaks.
- ▶ **Increase amount of time for taking tests or time tables.**
- ▶ **Discuss what sections of a book will be read aloud with a student before calling on them to read** (ex. the night before).
- ▶ **Have semi structured social activities** (i.e. lunch inside have students pair with someone they don't know or pair them, encourage social bingo to ask questions to find out information, etc).

# So, what can you do?

## Skill Development strategies

- ▶ **Be aware of physical symptoms and provide activities to distract the child.** Calming activities, such as, reading or listening to music may help to alleviate some of the physical symptoms and allow a child to return to class work after a period of time.
- ▶ **Talk to the student about what interventions they would find helpful.** This provides the child an opportunity to talk about situations that cause anxiety symptoms as well as for them to be more aware of their symptoms.
- ▶ **Prompt use of coping skills or positive self-talk with verbal and non-verbal prompts.**
- ▶ **Reward effort by a student with anxiety or depression.** When a child shows effort or is able to control their anxiety symptoms through interventions, let them know you have noticed and are proud of their efforts.

# Skill Development cont'd....

- ▶ **Create group activities that role-play appropriate behaviors.** Allows opportunity to teach young children what to do in specific situations, such as anger management, stress reduction, test anxiety.
- ▶ **Find books that address children with mental health challenges to incorporate in reading curriculum.**
- ▶ **Help students break assignments down into smaller segments.**
- ▶ **Teach students relaxation techniques they can do at school, such as deep breathing and grounding exercises** (i.e. 3 deep breaths before turning a test over, before reading out loud, or at the beginning of a presentation).



Questions?

# Resources

- ▶ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry - [http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Resource\\_Centers/Anxiety\\_Disorder\\_Resource\\_Center/Home.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Anxiety_Disorder_Resource_Center/Home.aspx)
- ▶ Anxiety and Depression Association of America - <http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>
- ▶ Center for Disease Control – [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- ▶ Healthy Place - <http://www.healthyplace.com>
- ▶ National Institute of Mental Health - <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- ▶ The Habits of Stress-Resilient People Dr. Brian King (2016)