



Children: Anxiety and Mental Health

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Mental Health: What is It?

A state of well-being that allows us to enjoy our lives and can help children and youth weather the normal ups and downs of life.

Positive mental health includes a variety of components of well-being, including:
Positive emotions.

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HABITS THAT ARE BENEFICIAL TO MY MENTAL HEALTH

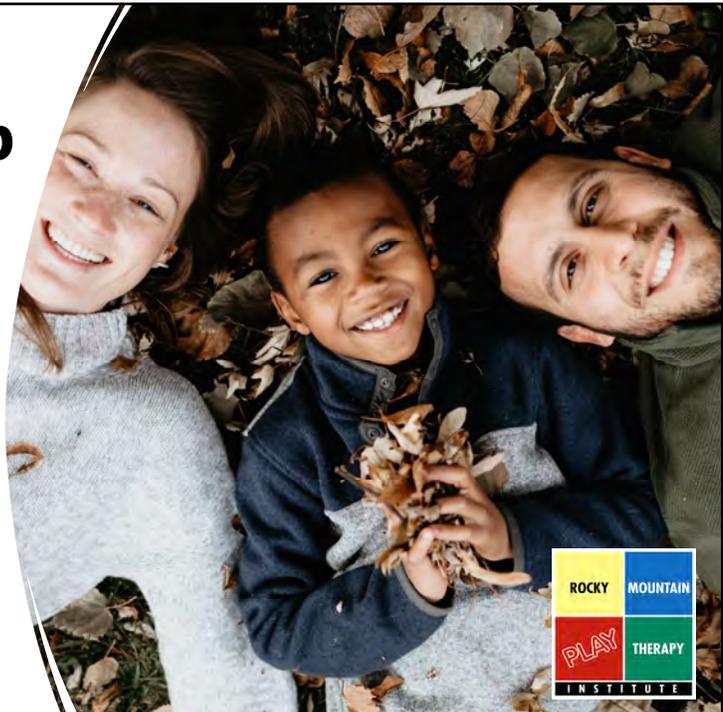
@crazyheadcomics



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What's Your Job as a Parent?

- 1) **Always Be:**
-Bigger -Stronger -Wiser -Kind
- 2) **Whenever Possible:**
Follow Your Child's Need
- 3) **Whenever Necessary:**
Take Charge



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(Refer to Handouts)

Encouraging Mental Health through Positive Emotions

- Looking for Highlights
- Freeing Children from Stress
- Relaxation
- Imagine Games

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Highlights

Teach children to look for simple highlights:

- Hug from a friend
- Seeing a bird close up
- Laughing when playing a sport
- Noticing you can do something better than before
- Relaxing on a bench eating lunch with your mom
- Learning a new thing –drawing something?
- Fresh sheets, a nice smell, a favorite taste, a favorite meal



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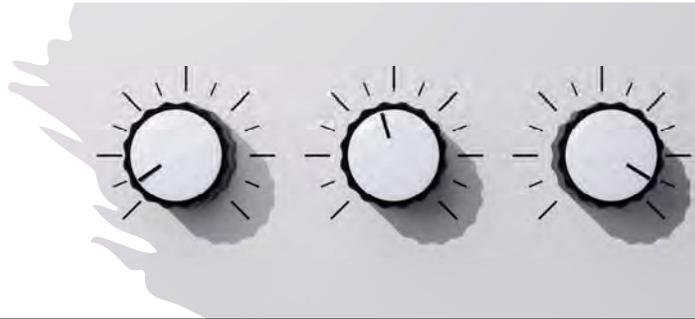
Freeing Children from Stress

It's not the stressful event itself that is so important, rather it is how you react to it!

Examples:

“Tree It”

“Changing Channels”



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Relaxation

- Spaghetti Toes
- Ocean Wave Breathing
- Clocking Pulse



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Imagine Games

- Echo Lake
- Creating Images
 - 4 different animals with tails
 - 4 different things that fly
 - 3 animals that lay eggs
 - 2 things you like to do

Ask child to describe what they saw

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A large collage of colorful sticky notes (pink, yellow, blue, green) with black question marks scattered across the left side of the slide.The Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute logo is positioned in the top right corner of the slide, identical to the one on slide 9.

What is Anxiety?

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Anxiety is...

Anticipation of a future concern and is more associated with muscle tension and avoidance behavior.

Fear is an emotional response to an immediate threat and is more associated with a fight or flight reaction – either staying to fight or leaving to escape danger.



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Anxiety Symptoms

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge.
- Getting easily tired
- Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Being irritable
- Having muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep



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Anxiety is Simple

- 1) We all have it, so it is normal!
- 2) We all have to talk to our worries
- 3) We can't let our worries be the "boss of us"

Anxiety is... "I'm afraid of the dark"
XXXXXXXXXX (insert ANY worry) and

"I can't handle it!"

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What Makes Anxiety Worse?

- Feeding a worry
- Temperament of Child
- Sensory system – High sensitivities
- Having a parent who worries a lot
- Protecting a child from having a feeling or facing a feeling
- Unmediated exposure to confusing happenings

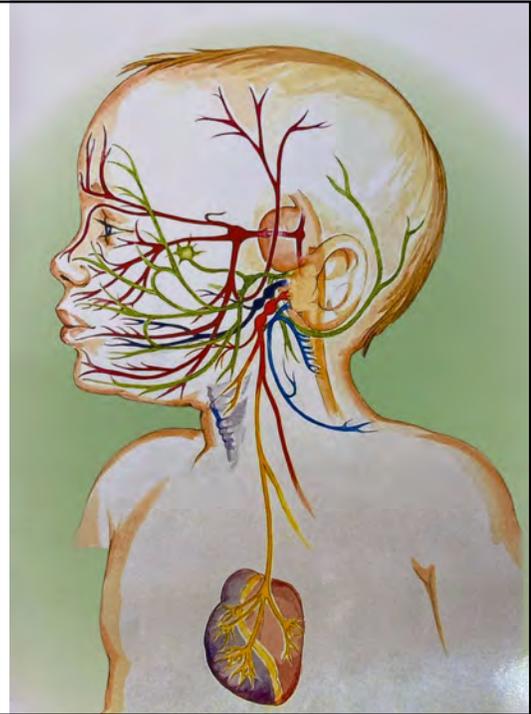


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What Happens in Your Brain?

Your brain contains billions of nerve cells arranged in patterns that coordinate thought, emotion, behavior, **movement** and sensation. ... While all the parts of your brain work together, each part is responsible for a specific function — controlling everything from your heart rate to your mood.

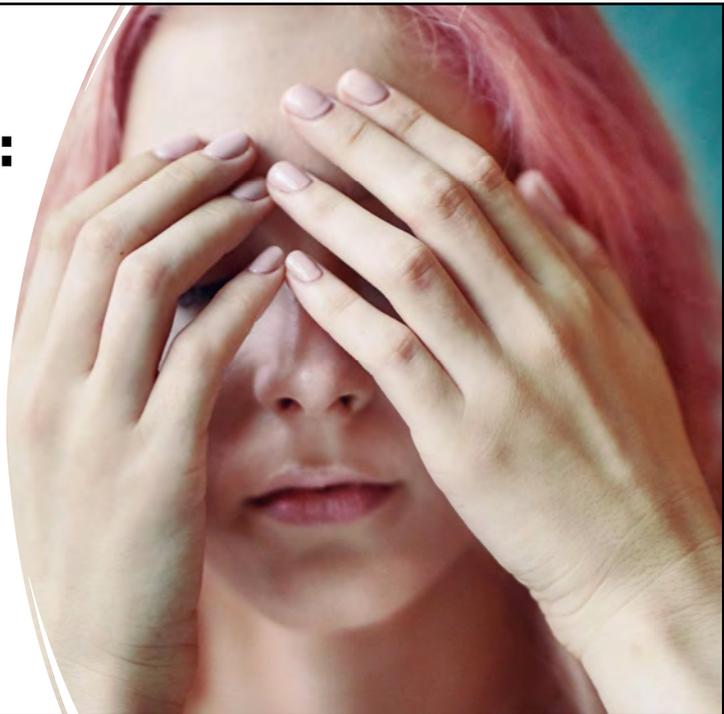
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aCYSYM1MA>



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Polyvagal Theory: The Vagus Nerve

- In times of stress or danger, our body is hard-wired to respond. The **sympathetic** nervous system triggers the fight-or-flight action response.
- There is another response — courtesy of the **parasympathetic** nervous system — known as freeze-or-faint. These responses are related to branches of the vagus nerve.

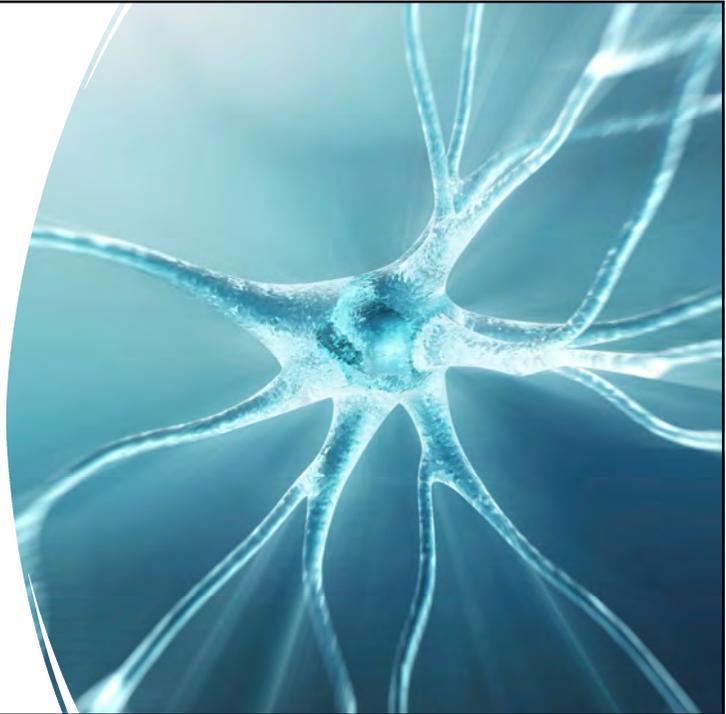


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Polyvagal Theory: Vagus Nerve Continued

The vagus nerve is the longest nerve in the body. It connects your brain to organs like the intestines, stomach, lungs, and heart.

In layman's terms, the vagus nerve is what makes the mind-body connection possible. Have you ever had "butterflies" in your stomach? Or a stomach in knots? The vagus nerve is why we feel a "gut reaction" to certain situations. All of the above relates to Polyvagal Theory.



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Why Can't I Tell My Child to Just Calm Down?



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Threat Response Continuum

Bruce Perry www.childtraumacademy.com

Internal State	Calm	Alert	Alarm	Fear	Terror
Brain System Primary and Secondary	Neo Cortex Cortex	Cortex Limbic	Limbic Midbrain	Midbrain Brain Stem	Brain Stem
Plans	Extended Future	Days/Hours	Hours Minutes	Minutes/Seconds	Loss of Sense of Time
Does	Thinking/Reflecting (Abstract)	Thinking/Learning (Concrete)	Emotion	Reactive	Reflexive
Fight/Flight (Hyper Arousal)	Rest	Vigilance	Resistance (Crying)	Defiance (Tantrums)	Aggression
Freeze/ Surrender (Dissociative)	Rest	Avoidance	Complaint (Robotic)	Foetal Rocking	Fainting
Cognitive abilities and Developmental Stage	30 year-old 15 year-old Adult/Adolescent	15 year-old 8 year-old Adolescent/Child	8 year-old 3 year-old Child/Toddler	3 year-old 1 year-old Toddler/Infant	1 year-old newborn Infant/Newborn
Responds to	Talk, Ideas	Talk, Engaged Learning	Play, Engage Learning, Metaphors	Reactive Doing, Cues	Safety Cues (nonverbal)

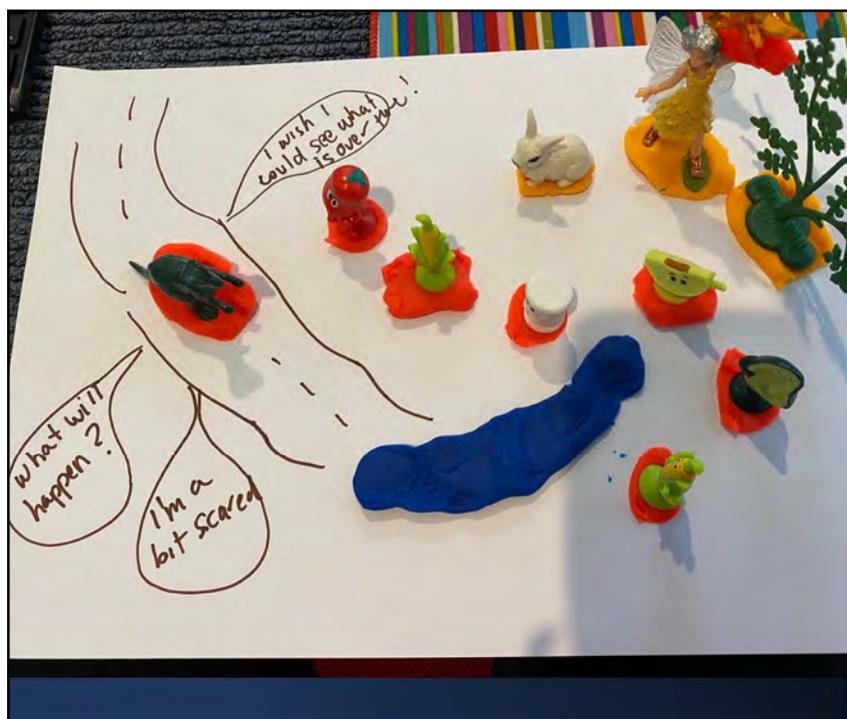
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Things "to do" About Anxiety

- Teach your child to be a thought detective
- Don't avoid
- Take deep breaths with your child
- Model helpful coping – use calming exercises
- Don't reinforce worries
- Check your own behaviour
- Break down worries into manageable chunks
- Keep the anticipatory period short
- Talk about scary stuff
- Schedule down time
- Teach your kids about their brains
- Create a worry character

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Play-Based Interventions

Working with fears

Child working with characters to address anxious feelings about transitions

Giving voice to and externalizing fears



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Create the Anxiety Character

“Spike”



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Working with "Spike"

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Working with "Leo and Spike"

- Therapist made a figure of her anxiety
- The anxiety figures "get together" to try to trick us
- We work together to manage and contain the Leo and Spike
- Power in joining and planning

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Questions

