

Supporting and Understanding Worries and Anxieties

Acknowledgements to:
Emotion Coaching UK

Presented by: Dr Carrie Stewart

Bournville Village Primary School, Thursday 5th November



Welcome

- House-keeping
- Introductions

Introducing Worry



Worry in Context: Why do we need emotions?



Distress



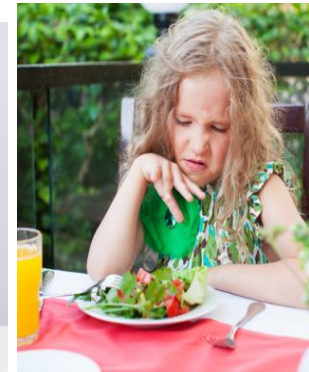
Fear



Anger



Surprise



Disgust

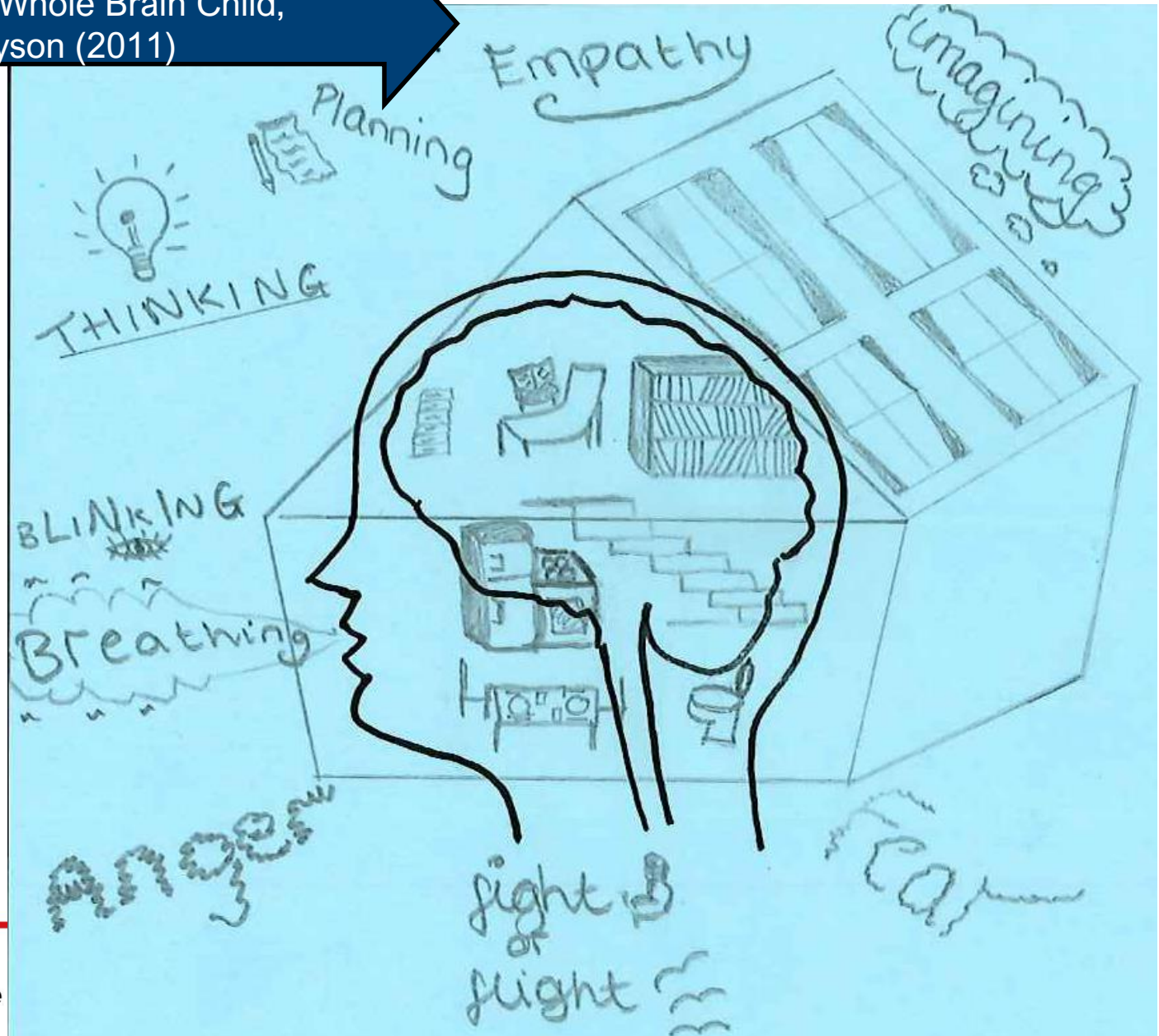


Joy

We all have emotions and they are hardwired for our **survival**

Adapted from The Whole Brain Child,
Siegel & Bryson (2011)

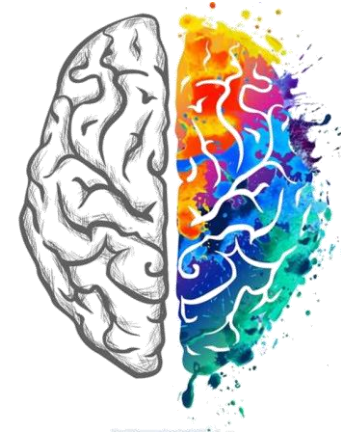
The Upstairs and Downstairs Brain



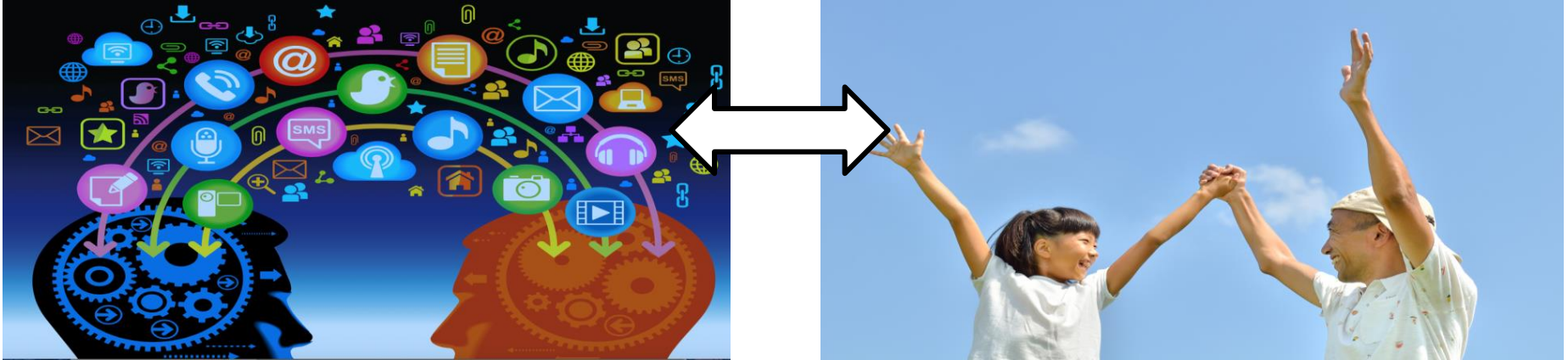
Emotional Regulation



- The child's prefrontal cortex (*upstairs brain*) is functionally less mature at birth than the limbic system (*downstairs brain*), so they are easily overwhelmed by emotions.
- Because neural connections between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex are developing and proliferating, children need help and time to think, reason and calm themselves down.
- With **consistent, supportive, emotional responses** from adults a child's frontal cortex will develop the essential brain pathways that, over time, support self regulation to better manage alarm states in the limbic system.



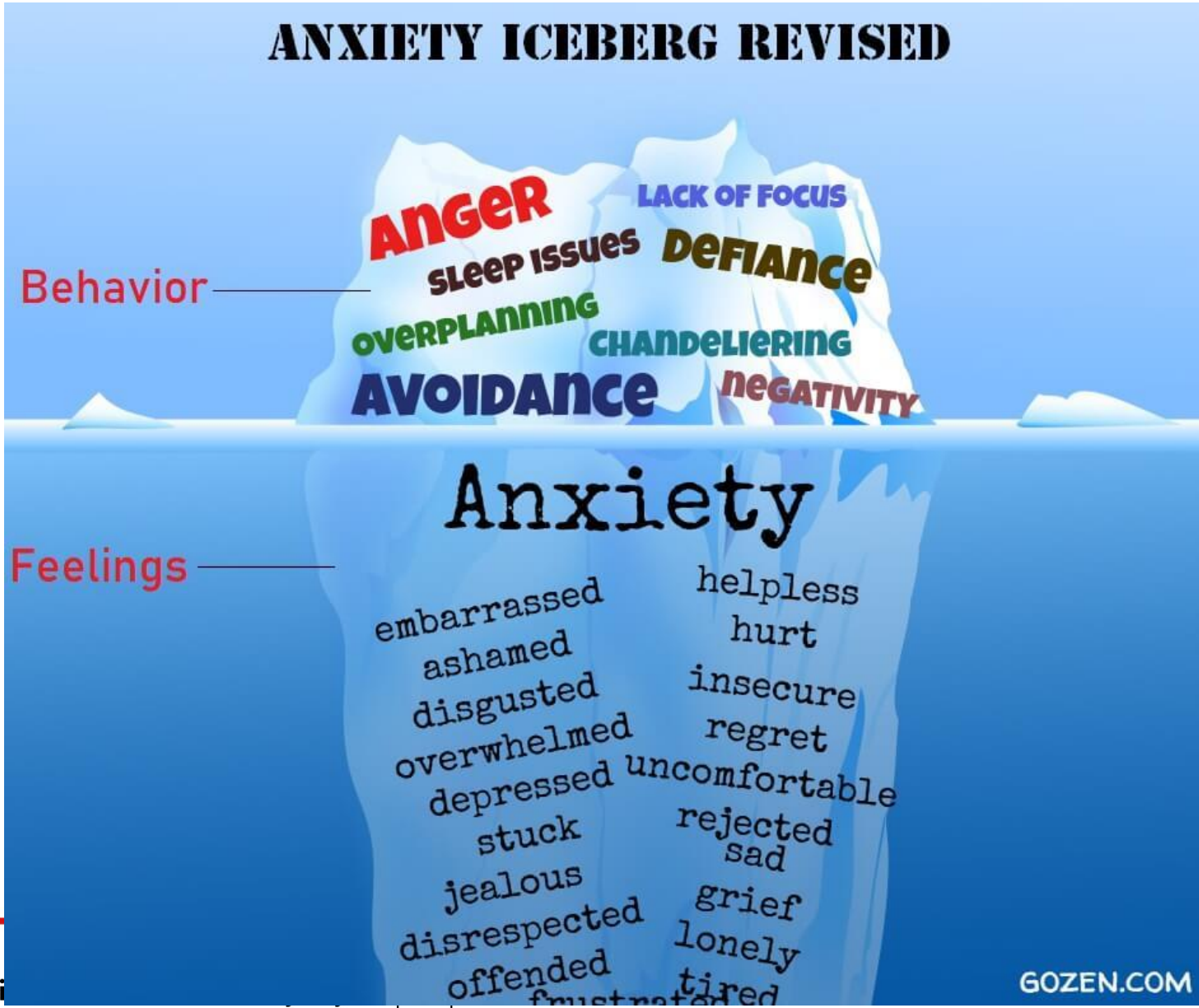
Building Brains by Learning from Others



- Some researchers have suggested that mirror neurons enable humans to **emulate** others and thereby **empathise** and **understand** intent – essential for the **socialization** of children.
- However, they have been referred to as ‘The most hyped concept in neuroscience’ and their existence and the nature of these complex brain systems is much debated by scientists in the field.’

Signs of Worry and Anxiety





Normalising Worry and Anxiety

- Children tend to feel anxious about different things at different ages.



- Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up, and reflect brain development.
- They can also often be a response to a significant incident and are a way of processing what has happened.
- Worry around COVID is normal and to be expected at this stage!

When Might it Be Something More?



It's a good idea to seek help if your child is constantly anxious and:

- It has been going on for more than a few months without any recent incident.
- It is not getting better, or is getting worse over that period of time.
- Self-help strategies don't seem to be working
- It is significantly affecting their school or family life, or their friendships

What Can Be Done to Help?



What Happens in School



Managing at Home: Styles of dealing with emotions

Emotion
Disapproving

Emotion Dismissing

Laissez-Faire

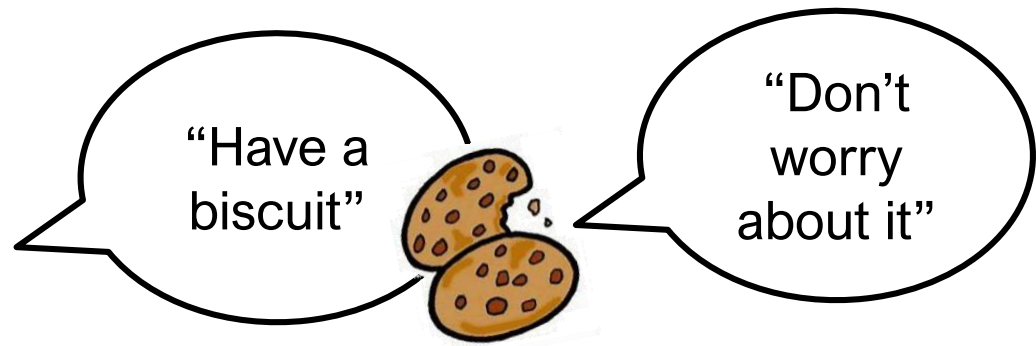
Emotion Coaching

A Disapproving Style..



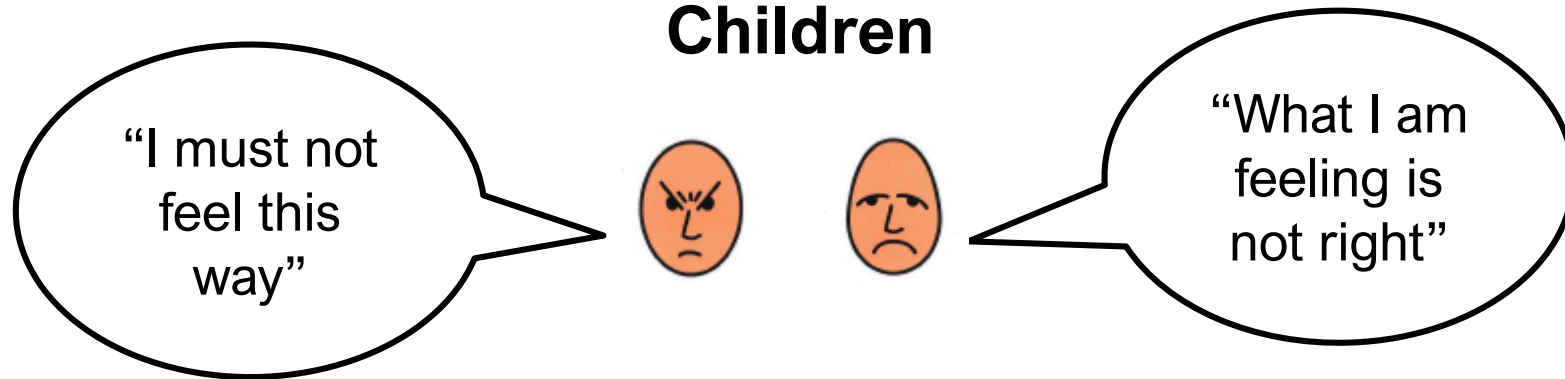
- Disapproves of negative emotions – viewed as a sign of weakness, lack of control, unconstructive
- Lacks empathy, noticeably critical and intolerant
- Tries to get rid of negative emotions via discipline, reprimand, punishment
- Focuses on the behaviour rather than the emotions generating the behaviour
- More likely to view negative emotional displays as a form of manipulation, lack of obedience, sign of bad character
- Often motivated by need to control and regain power and/or to ‘toughen up’ child

A Dismissing Style..



- Despite good intentions (wants to make child feel better) is uncomfortable, fearful, anxious, hurt, annoyed or overwhelmed with negative emotions
 - Wants negative emotions to go away quickly
 - Considers paying attention to such emotions will make them worse, prolong them
 - Tries to stop negative emotions by reducing/ minimising/ making light of their importance/significance, e.g. it's no big deal, don't worry about it, be a big girl, that's life, you'll be fine
 - Often motivated by need to rescue and make things better, fix the problem e.g. 'have a biscuit', 'I'll buy a new one', 'you need to do this'
 - Focuses on getting rid of the emotion with logic or distraction rather than understanding the feelings
-

Effects of Dismissing and Disapproving Styles upon Children



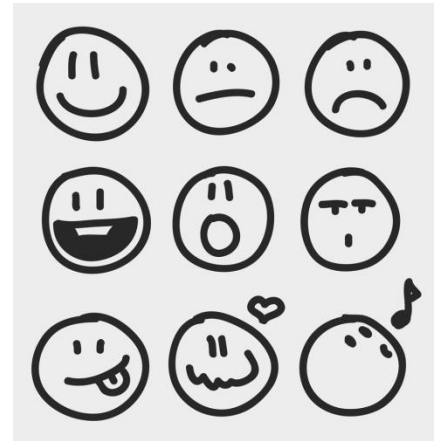
- Child does **not learn to trust own feelings** affecting decision-making
- Not given **opportunities to experience** emotions and deal with them effectively so grow up unprepared for life's challenges Not given opportunities to **self-regulate or problem-solve**
- Can lead to **suppression of natural emotions**, less or lack of self- regulation, reliance on distraction to get rid of emotion
- Generates **more negative feelings** - resentment, guilt, shame, anger

Laissez-Faire Style (or permissive)

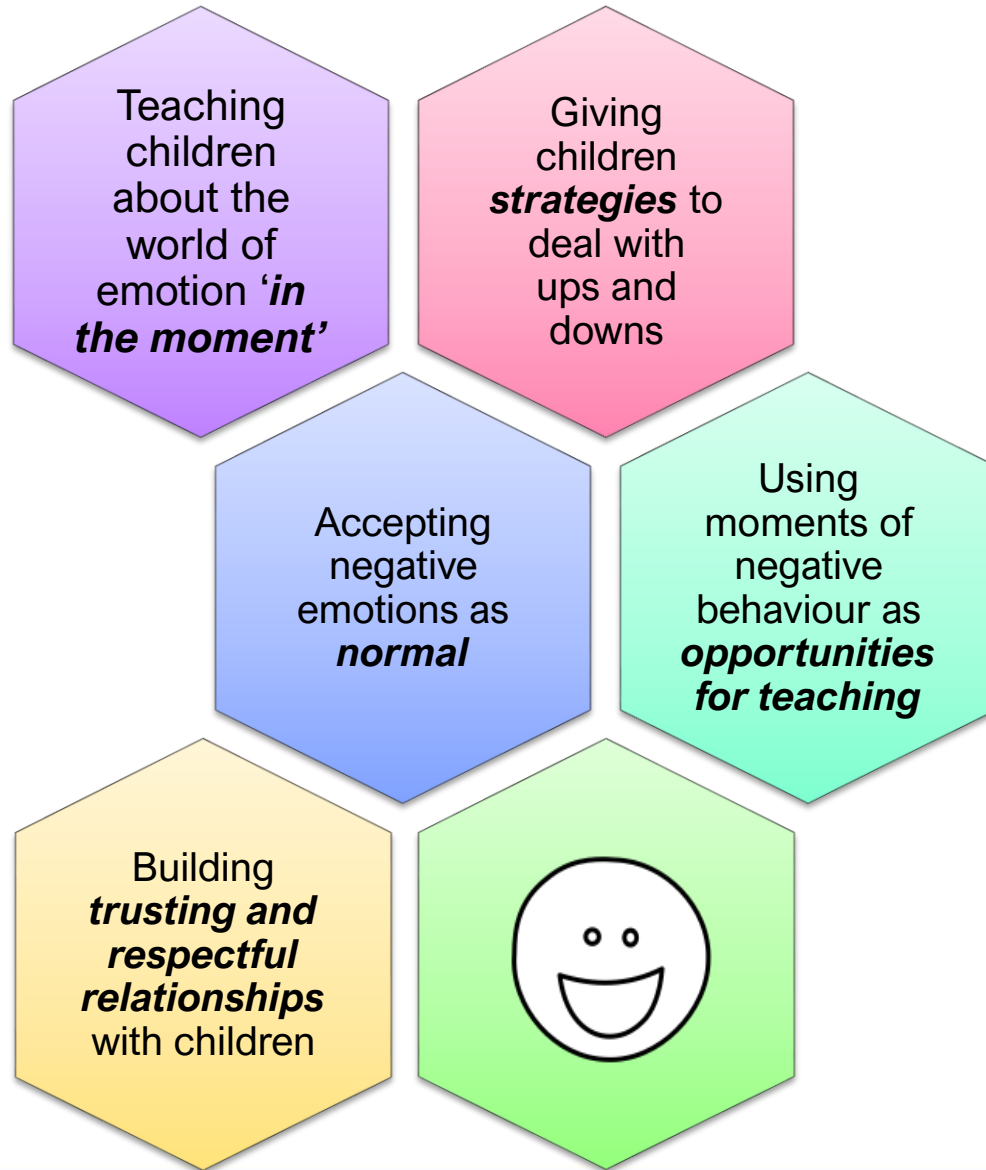


Laissez-Faire Style

- Freely accepts all emotional expression from the children
- Offers comfort to the child experiencing negative feelings
- Offers little guidance on behaviour
- Does not teach the child about emotions
- Is permissive; does not set limits
- Does not help children solve problems
- Does not teach problem-solving methods to the child
- Believes there is little you can do about negative emotions other than ride them out.
- Believes that managing negative emotions is a matter of hydraulics; release the emotion and the work is done.



Emotion Coaching



Emotion Management Styles

Emotion Coaching

High empathy
High guidance



Disapproving

Low empathy
High guidance

Laissez Faire

High empathy
Low guidance

Dismissive

Low empathy
Low guidance

Benefits of Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching is an evidence-based strategy, based upon the work of John Gottman



(Gottman, et al 1996)

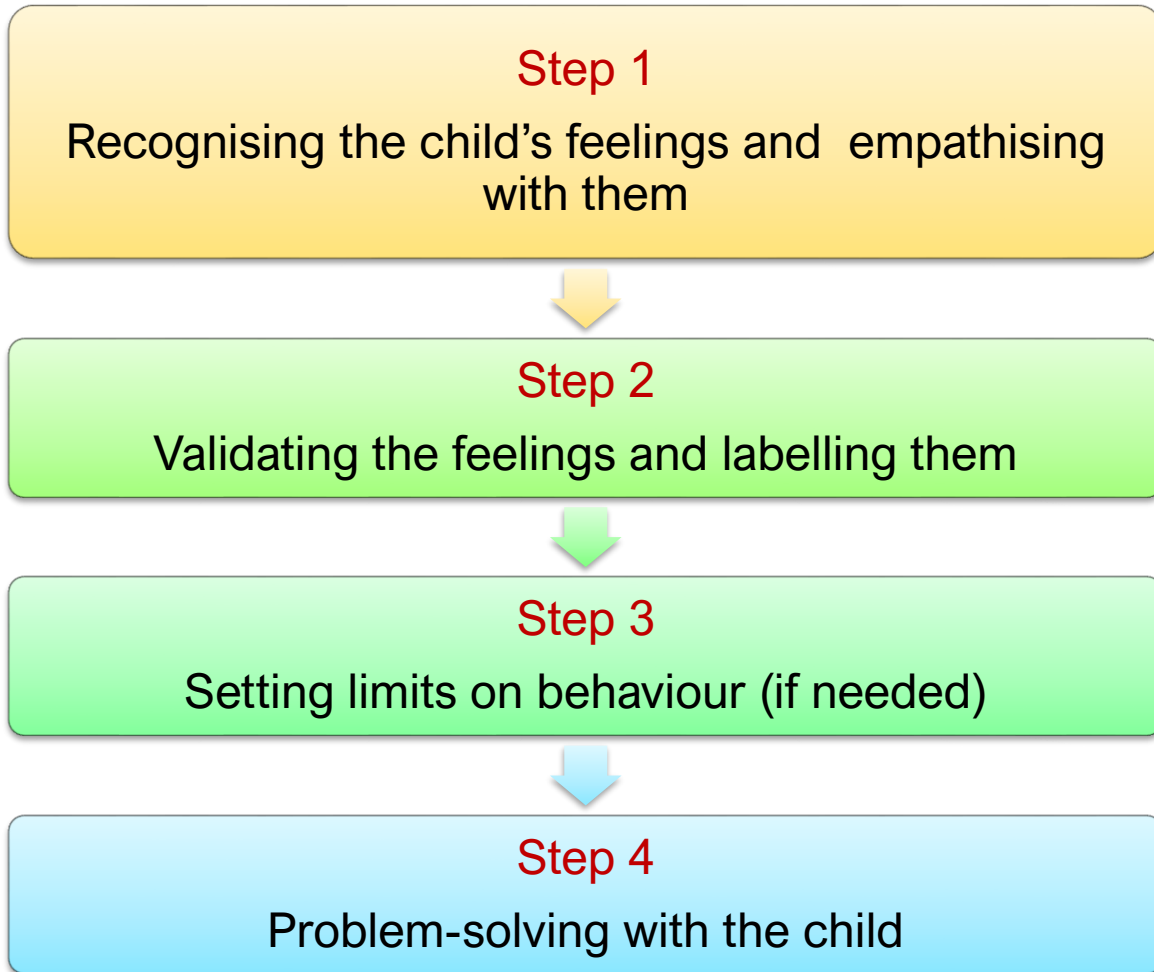
Emotion Coached children are better able to:

- Control their impulses
- Delay gratification
- Self soothe when upset
- Pay attention

As a result Emotion Coached children:

- Achieve more academically in school
- Are more popular
- Have fewer behavioural problems
- Have fewer infectious illnesses
- Are more emotionally stable
- Are more resilient

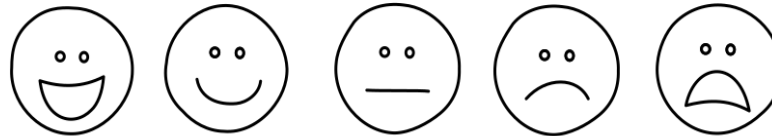
How to Emotion Coach



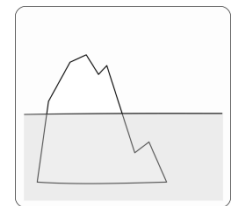


Step 1: “Connect before Correct”

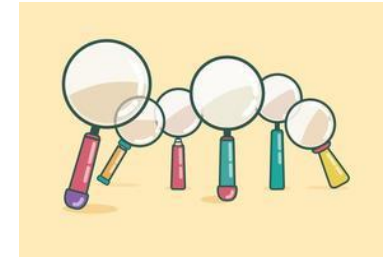
- Need to genuinely **empathise** with your child from their point of view. This doesn't mean agreeing with them, just viewing things from their perspective
- Recognise all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice



- Recognise behaviour as **communication** (relational vs behavioural model)
- Look for **physical** and **verbal** signs of the emotion being felt
- Take on the **child's perspective** (mentalising/mind-mindedness)



Step 2: Labelling and Validating Feelings



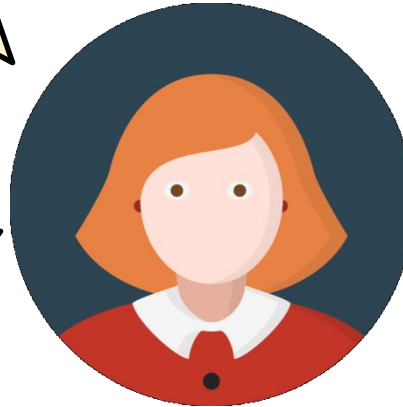
- Use words to reflect back his or her emotion and help them to label what they are feeling.
- Simply observe – saying what you see rather than asking probing questions to which they might not know answer in the moment when they are worried or anxious.
- Telling your children that you understand their emotional situation and that you don't blame them helps sooth their emotional brain.

Step 2: Examples of Coaching Scripts

“I can see you’re frowning and you’re kicking the wall and you’re expressing a lot of energy. I would be feeling like that too if I didn’t want to do something”

“I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if that happened to me. It’s normal to feel like that”

“I noticed you looking around at the other who are working on their projects. I think you might be feeling nervous right now about whether your work will be ok.”



Steps 1 and 2: Hints and Tips

Acknowledge **low levels of emotion** before they escalate to full-blown crisis.

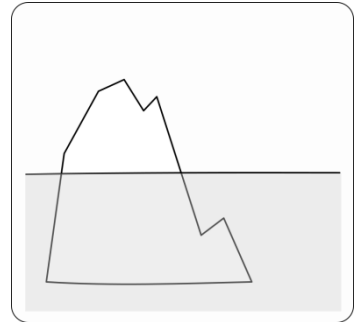
Acknowledge **all emotions** as being **natural** and **normal** and not always a matter of choice.

Recognise **behaviour as communicative** (relational not behavioural model).



Demonstrating **empathy** when stakes are low creates a good foundation.

Becoming the **child's ally**.



Step 3: Setting Limits (if needed)

State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour (positive limit setting)

Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted.

Retain child's self-dignity



'You are angry that I've taken away your phone but these are the rules everyone has to follow. I will keep it safe for you'

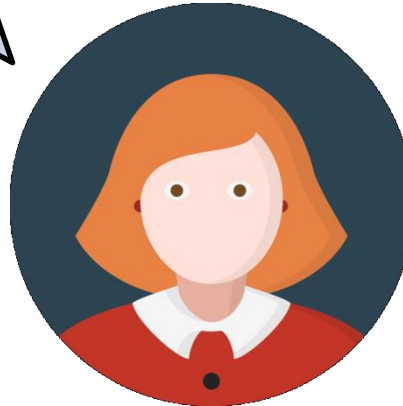
Rose, 2014

Step 3: Examples of Coaching Scripts

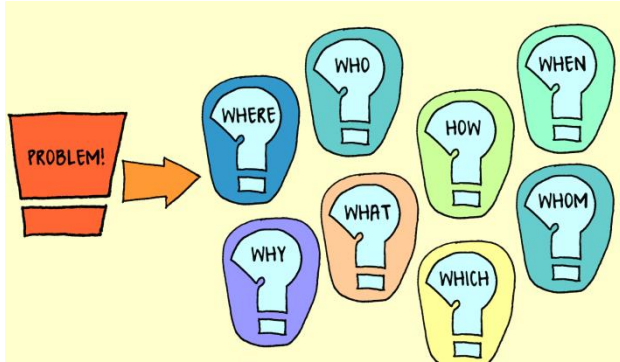
“I know you are scared about going to school. It’s ok to be scared and there are things we can do together that will help. We still have to go to school.”

“These are the rules that we have to follow. Doing that is not ok”.

“We can’t behave like that even though you are feeling worried, because it is not safe”.



Step 4: Problem Solving with the Child

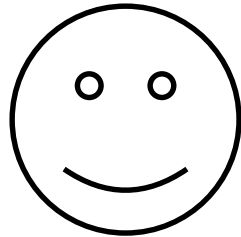


When your child is calm and in a relaxed, rational state:

Explore the feelings that give rise to the behaviour/problem/incident

Scaffold alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes

Empower them to believe they can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour.



Finding Solutions: Example Scripts

“What does your body feel like now?”

“What feelings are you having?”

“Let’s think of what we could have done instead”

“Can you think of a different way to deal with your feelings?”

“I can help you to think of a different way to cope”

“Can you remember what we said before?”

“Let’s sort this out”

“Try and do this next time you feel like this”

“Let’s decide what you will do next time you feel like this”

“This is what you can do instead”

“What might your friend do or suggest you do?”



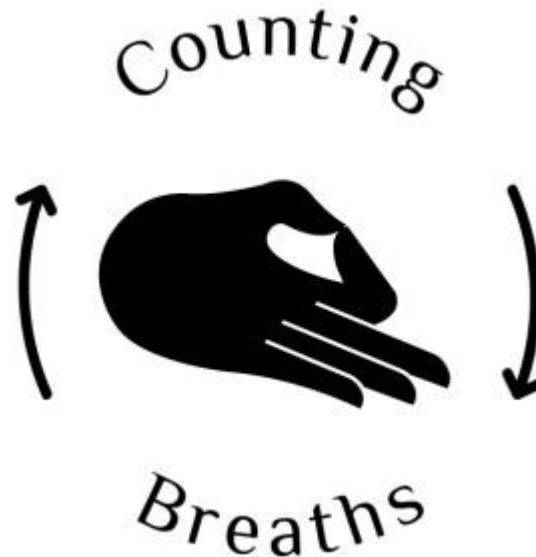
Activity:

Think about a recent experience where you felt your child was worried or anxious.

What is an emotion coaching script based on the four stages you could have used?

Strategies to Try Alongside Emotion Coaching I

1. Talk about it. Normalise it. Be consistent with anything you try.
2. Breathing exercises



Strategies to Try II

3. Calm boxes



4. Fiddle toys



Strategies to Try II

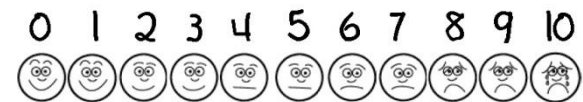
5. Reading books together



6. Emotions cards and scales



Worry Scale



Zero means I am not worried at all. 10 means that I am so worried that I feel like someone is going to die.

Strategies to Try III

7. Worry dolls or worry books/journals



8. Physical reminders or transitional objects



(St. Wenceslaus, n.d.)

Strategies to Try IV

9. Extra curricular activities



10. And giving them down-time to relax!



Further Resources I

Websites:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/>

<https://www.heysigmund.com/>

Books for Parents:

‘The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Proven Strategies to Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind’ by Dr Tina Payne Bryson and Dr. Daniel Siegel (2012)

‘Starving the Anxiety Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Anxiety Management for Young People,’ by Kate Collins-Donnelly (2013)

Further Resources II

Books for Children:

- ‘The Huge Bag of Worries’ by Virginia Ironside (2011)
- ‘Have You Filled a Bucket Today?’ by Carol McCloud (2015)
- ‘The Colour Monster’ by Anna Llenas (2016)
- ‘The Invisible String’ by Patrice Karst (2001)
- ‘Willy and the Wobbly House’ and ‘A Nifflenoo Called Nevermind’, by Margot Sunderland.
- ‘Anxiety Sucks! A Teen Survival Guide’ by Natasha Daniels (2016)
- ‘Anxiety Survival Guide for Teens: CBT Skills to Overcome Fear, Worry, and Panic’ by Jennifer Shannon (2015)

