

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids: Help for Children to Cope with Stress, Anxiety & Transitions

By: Lawrence E. Shapiro & Robin K. Sprague

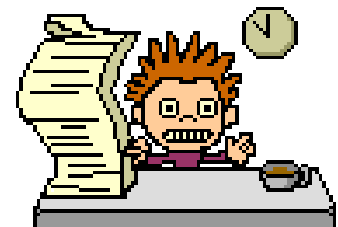
Presented by:

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Please click on the stressed out child in the corner to be connected to internet sources and videos 😊

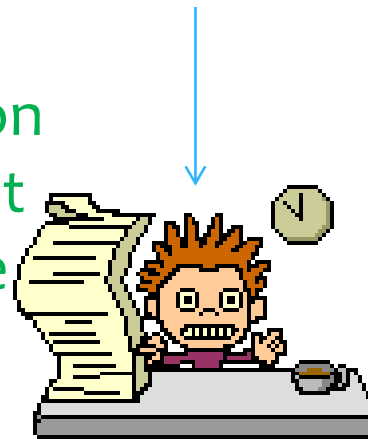


STRESS

“While some stress is normal and necessary for human development, too much can be harmful—to both you and your child” (Shapiro, Sprague, & Mckay, 2009, Foreward).

“Every bit of learning and growth involves a degree of stress, followed by the indescribable pleasure of a new achievement” (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009, p. 1).

While experiencing bouts of small stressors is normal and healthy for development, significant stress and/or constant lower level stress can have profound effects on children resulting in physical aches and pains, significant effects on mood and behaviour, and suppression of the immune system (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).



ANXIETY:

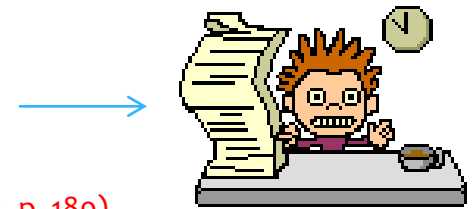
Persistent and excessive **FEAR** and **ANXIETY** related to behavioural disturbances that is inappropriate for the child's *developmental level* (Rathus, 2006) and "...is a continuous characteristic that, when elevated, represents a generalized **vulnerability** to mood disorders" (Macleod et al., 2007, p. 161).

"Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat" (APA, 2013, p. 189).

- * Automatic arousal of *fight or flight*"
- * Thoughts of immediate danger
- * Escape behaviours

"Anxiety is anticipation of future threat" (APA, 2013, p. 189).

- * Muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger
- * Cautious
- * Avoidant behaviours



Quick Starts!

- * Over 55,000 BC children aged 5 to 19 are currently coping with at least one anxiety disorder (Anxiety BC, 2014).
- * **Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental health problem** (Anxiety BC, 2014).
- * Anxiety disorders are found in 10.7-17.3% of children and are 45% of mental health diagnoses (Kerig & Wenar, 2006).
- * By age 6, females are twice as likely to have experienced an anxiety disorder—this gender gap increases with age! (Kerig & Wenar, 2006).

Common ANXIETY Disorders:

- * **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** – “Always worries about everything”.
- * **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder** – Intrusive ideas and behaviours that child recognizes are uncontrollable, irresistible, and often recognize as irrational.
- * **Panic Disorder** – A peak of intense fear within minutes.
- * **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder** – Child has experienced an actual or threatened death, serious injury, or a threat to the self or others marked by future intense fear, helplessness, or horror with behaviours of agitation or disorganization.
- * **Separation Anxiety Disorder** – “clingy”- excessive anxiety over separation from human attachments.
- * **Social Anxiety Disorder** – “extremely shy child” – overly self-conscious and avoidant due to fear of causing embarrassment.
- * **Selective Mutism**- Failure to speak in certain social situations.
- * **Specific Phobias** – persistent unreasonable fear cued by anticipation of object or situation.

Common Theories of ANXIETY in Children:

Biological Theorists

Innate temperament or genetic coding.

Family Theorists

Emotional climate of the family that causes anxiety.

- * Anxiety in children is a fear response activated by the amygdala – “a brain structure important for the regulation of emotion and stress” (Elsevier, 2013).
- * Researchers recruited 76 children, 7 to 9 years of age, a period when anxiety-related traits and symptoms can first be reliably identified. Using MRI scans, the researchers found that children with high levels of anxiety had enlarged amygdala volume (Elsevier, 2014).
- * Heritability accounts for roughly 1/3 of diagnoses (Kerig & Wenar, 2006).
- * Children with anxiety disorders are often internalizers; meaning, they turn environmental stressors inwards (Kerig & Wenar, 2006).
- * Research suggests that family dynamics contribute to anxiety in children.

Common Theories of ANXIETY in Children cont'd:

Psychoanalytic
Theorists
Unconscious
trauma.

- * Unconscious painful memories and feelings from early childhood experiences manifest themselves as anxiety.
- * Children's behavior often reflects passing problems that arise in reaction to temporary stresses (APSAA, 2014).
- * Preschool children exposed to main caregiver smacking in the first two years were twice as likely to have emotional and behavioural problems as children not smacked by their main caregiver (Scott et al., 2013).

Attachment
Theorists

Strengthen bonds
to create trust &
stability.

- * Disturbed attachments during early infancy may result in anxiety.
- * Brumariu and Kerns (2008) found that "...lower attachment security and higher ambivalent attachment were most consistently related to higher social anxiety" (p. 1).
- * Mothers with symptoms of depression and separation anxiety had girls who were significantly more likely have increased anxiety (Zerwas et al., 2014).
- * Children of mothers with mood symptoms during pregnancy and postpartum were 82% and 87% (respectively) more likely have presenting psychiatric disorders at six years of age (Santos et al., 2014).
- * Insecure attachment may result in a world feeling unreliable and unpredictable leaving the child feeling helpless (Kerig & Wenar, 2006).



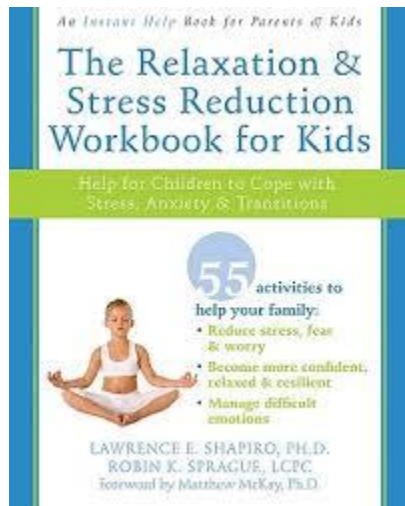
Common Theories of ANXIETY in Children cont'd:

Cognitive
Behavioural
Theorists
Anxiety is learned.

- * Change the child's thoughts and feelings by not reacting and reinforcing behaviours.
- * Little emphasis on exploring past; present and future orientated.
- * Change is a result of caregivers stopping and changing what is reinforcing the behaviour.
- * Most highly researched; however, James et al. (2013) found that “evidence suggesting that CBT is more effective than active controls or TAU [treatment as usual] or medication at follow-up, is limited and inconclusive”.
- * Research suggests that around 20% of children inherit the inhibited temperament type (high motor activity and irritability) (Kerig & Wenar, 2006, p. 239).
- * Lacking in a sense of self efficacy adds to cognitive distortions which arose through negative experiences in the environment and lead children to shape their own maladaptive environments (Kerig & Wenar, 2006, p. 240).

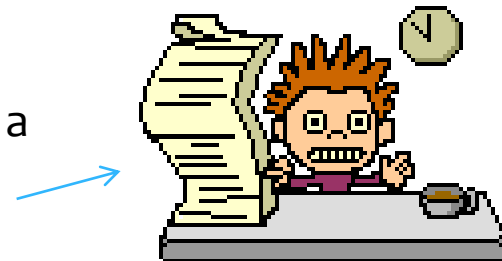
What theory is best to treat ANXIETY?

Despite differences in developmental pathways to anxiety disorders in children, counsellors should take a holistic and integrative approach to ensure no avenue has been overseen.



Throughout the rest of the presentation we will discuss “what is current” and then move into techniques to use with children.

Although not specific to children, this integrative hand out would be helpful as a practitioner to ensure all areas have been addressed.



What's current?

#trending

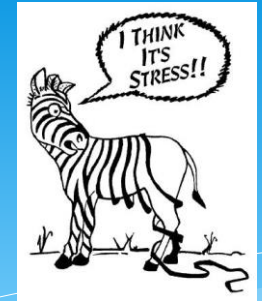
Some of the “**hot topics**” concerning children and families with regards to stress and anxiety are:

- Stressed out parents = stressed out kids.
 - Links between stress and difficulty developing attachment and self regulation skills.
- Teaching kids mindfulness techniques to cope with stress and/or anxiety such as those taught in Friends for Life and MindUP
- Importance of social and emotional skills as prevention
 - learning resiliency when confronting stressful situations (Schonert-Reichl & Stewart Lawlor, 2010).
 - “Universal interventions” – teaching everyone as prevention (Farrell & Barrett, 2007).

Identify
Signs of
Stress

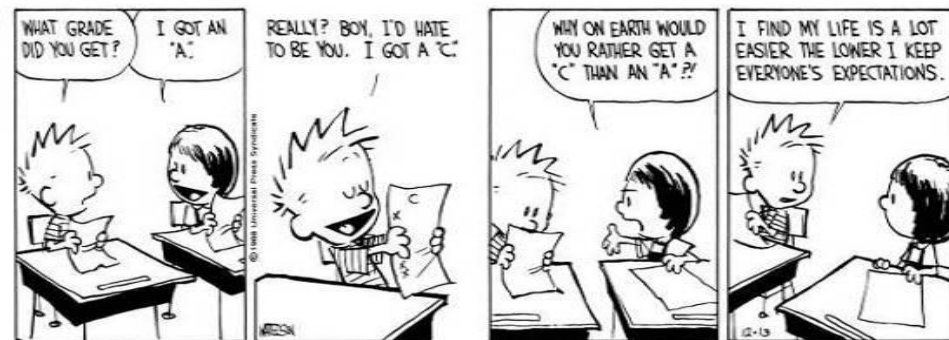


Let's talk about stress, baby!



- Current research suggest that when parents experience stress, their children also experience this stress or behavioral issues (Im-Bolter et al., 2014;). The result is that children may experience anxiety and/or develop difficult behaviours.
- Im-Bolter et al. (2014) suggested that parenting stress can lead to lower synchrony (parent–child interactions that are mutually regulated, reciprocal, and harmonious) and lower synchrony can heighten the risk of emotional and behavioral problems in children.

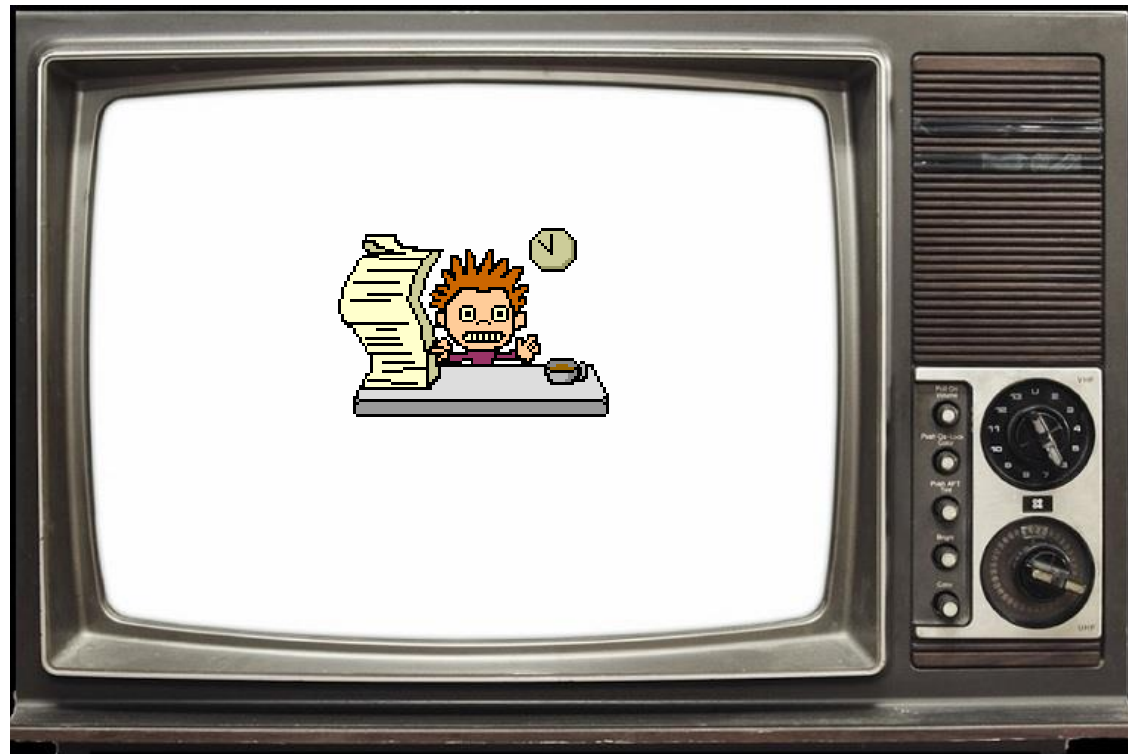
- McLeod et al. (2009) completed a meta-analysis of 47 studies and discovered that anxiety is moderately linked to the role of parenting (4%) with parental control being more consistently linked to anxiety than parental rejection.



Angry Kids and Stressed Out Parents

CBC's "Doc Zone" addresses the importance of investing in the early years in a day when parents are dealing with overwhelming mental health and behaviour issues in their children (Palmer, 2014). Experts are saying that mental health issues in children are on the rise partly because parents are too busy and too stressed (Palmer, 2014). Check out the preview below and the full video can be found in the notes section.

“For the first time in North American history, more children suffer from mental health conditions than from physical ones” – CBC Doc Zone, Palmer (2014)



Ideas for Treatment and Prevention

- “CBT approaches to child anxiety attempt to understand the roots of the presenting problem only to the degree that this understanding gives rise to a way to intervene in the “here and now”. Treatment is much more focused on addressing the factors that maintain the child’s symptoms rather than understanding what gave rise to the disorder” (Seligman & Ollendick, 2012).
- Farrell and Barrett(2007) suggested that treatment of emotional disorders ,such as anxiety, is effective in children, but due to the busy and/or stressed lifestyle many people are leading, few families seek clinical treatment. It is suggested that schools implement prevention programs to try to teach emotional resilience for all children through social-emotional curriculum (Farrell & Barrett, 2007) .
- Research suggests that universal prevention programs on mindfulness education, such as those provided in schools, significantly improve social and emotional competence and can improve positive emotions such as optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Stewart Lawlor, 2010) and computerized CBT universal and targeted interventions have positive effects on anxiety and low mood in children (Attwood et al., 2012).

Teaching Mindfulness



There are many great resources available to teach mindfulness activities to children and adolescents in group settings to promote prevention. Some of them include:

- **MindUP** – This is a program that is divided into different lessons that teach children social and emotional skills exploring mindfulness, positive psychology and cognitive neuroscience. By learning how their brains work, children are able to understand their reactions and learn self-regulation behaviours. More info can be found at:

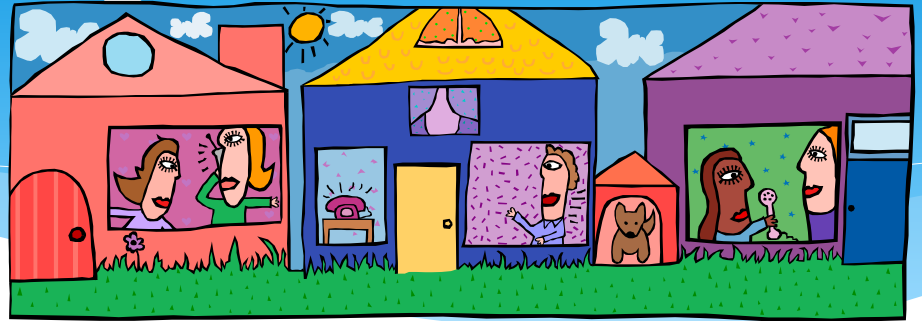


- **Friends for Life** – Friends is a CBT based program that was developed to teach kids to strengthen resiliency and ultimately reduce the risk of developing anxiety disorders . Teachers teach students about what anxiety feels like and some tips for how to deal with it such as guided imagery. More info can be found at:



- **Dr. Daniel Siegel** has also done some amazing work in this topic.

Chapter 1 – Reducing Stress in Your Home



This chapter teaches parents about how to reduce stress in the home. It also reminds parents that if they are overwhelmed by stress in lives, they should seek out support from a therapist.

- Reducing stress for the parents and caregivers has the greatest impact on reducing stress for children.
- Understanding their parenting style helps parents become more self aware
- Examining stress in the home and making small lifestyle changes can hugely influence how children feel stress (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).

Activities to try:

- Parent stress test and activities to reduce stress
- Setting limits in the house by developing “house rules” (include visuals for little ones who are not reading) Click [here](#) for an example of how one family created their family rules.
- Logging and reducing total screen time.
- Creating a complaint box to reduce family arguments.

Chapter 2 – Don't Let Stress Get You Down

This chapter gives parents strategies to help their children manage stress. There is a lot of variability in how children handle stress so it is important for parents to teach children a variety of different ways to cope.

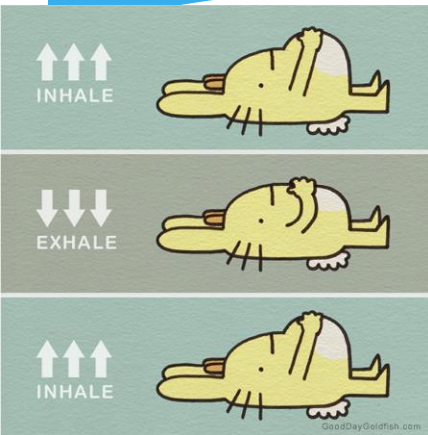
Activities to try:

- Using a stress scale so children can identify what causes them stress
- Finding out what activities help them relax and developing a plan for a healthy, active lifestyle
- Learning about feelings and identifying where they feel stress in their body (You will learn more about this later)
- Strategies for developing positive thoughts, problem solving techniques, learning about optimism and pessimism, and teaching gratitude



[Click here](#) for a great article about fostering gratitude in children.

Chapter 3 – Correct Breathing: Key to Relaxation



This chapter teaches children and parents about the importance of diaphragmatic breathing (“belly breathing”) and relaxation.

“The practice of focused breathing as a tool for meditation and relaxation comes down to us through centuries and across many cultures; modern sciences has simply confirmed ancient wisdom” (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009, p. 41).

Some of the suggested activities are: spelling your name by belly breathing, belly breathing while complimenting self (“I am brave”), and breathing happy thoughts (breathe in happiness, breath out sadness) (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).

Here are two videos that can help teach “belly breathing” to kids:

[Belly Breathing with Elmo](#)
[Swimming Stuffies](#)

Chapter 4 – Relaxing Through Guided Imagery



Guided imagery is “a gentle directive meditation that powerfully focuses the imagination” (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009, p. 49). It can be used in groups or to help an individual child deal with a specific problem.



Examples are provided in the book that can be read aloud for whole body relaxation, pain reduction, sleep, building self esteem, and reducing stress .

Tips for success :

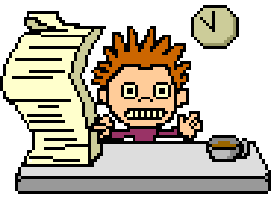
- Listen with an open-mind as guided imagery can bring up emotions and thoughts.
- Introduce this technique by practicing with “imagery games” (engaging a child with belly breathes and talking about different sensory experiences, such as the smell of fresh baked cookies or sound of water rushing).
- Create a quiet, safe space with a comfy chair or soft mats.
- Create a predictable routine-play quiet soft music, take a few deep breaths before starting and to tell the child it is finished, rub his legs or give her a glass of water.

Click on the *magical playground* to enjoy an example of guided imagery available online.



Chapter 5 – Mindfulness: A New Way to Deal with Stress

Mindfulness is a type of meditation that concentrates attention fully on whatever the person is experiencing in that moment.

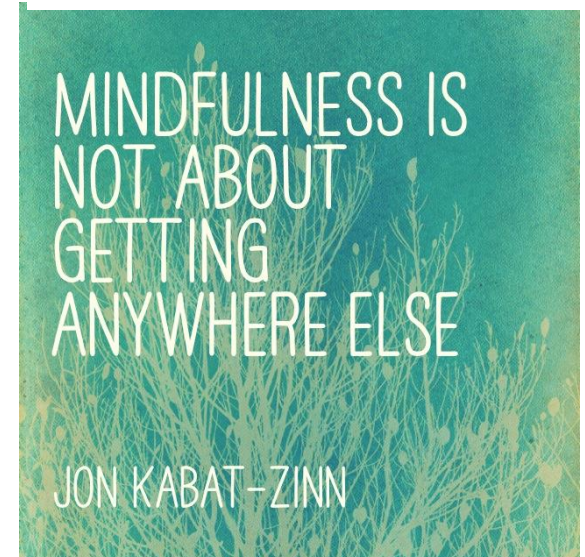
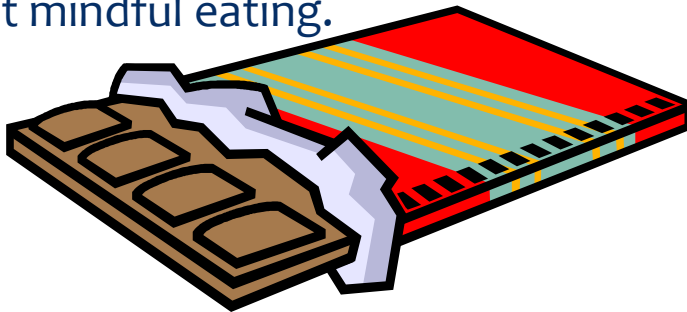


So what is a mindful child? Click on the little guy to the left to find out.



Children can practice mindfulness while eating, with their pet, doing their chores, and in nature too. Children also benefit when their caregivers practice and role model mindfulness.

Click on the chocolate bar to learn more about mindful eating.



Chapter 6 – Yoga for Kids

Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve peacefulness of body and mind, helping children relax to reduce stress and anxiety.

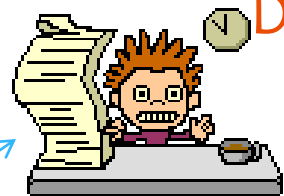
Yoga is not only relaxing, it is active!

Make yoga fun by exaggerating animal poses.

Pay attention to what the child needs!
Some children may need to release energy in tougher poses while others may enjoy the relaxation right away.



Click for 38 Ways Yoga Helps You From Looking Like This Little Guy



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Chapter 7 – Playing to Relax

Play is important for social and emotional development and through play children learn about their environment. Play is an excellent stress reliever too! Opportunities for traditional, spontaneous play is declining because children are spending more time in structured activities, overly academic school programs, and in front of screens (Sprague & Shapiro, 2009).



How can we support play?

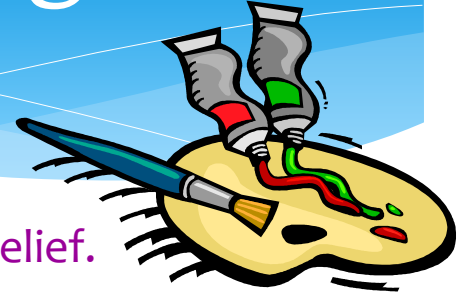
- Help children create a “No-More-Boredom Box” that includes toys, games, and art supplies for those times they say “I’m bored”.
- Set a timer for thirty minutes.
- Make up new games, build a fort, do mazes, start a collection, find a new hobby, and figure out what repetitive activities kids like to play.
- Teach children the skills to play on their own from a young age and also set aside time to play with your kids too.

“Play is the work of children”- Anna Freud

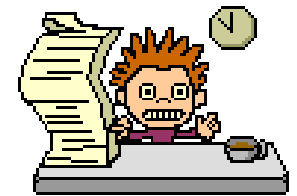
Chapter 8 – Relaxing Through Art

Art is *healing* in the following ways:

- It can be a healthy form of emotional discharge that results in quick relief.
- It can be a method of gaining symbolic control of overwhelming problems (e.g. bullying).
- Children are naturally drawn to art to reduce stress (e.g. colouring while waiting for dinner at a restaurant) (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).
- Children are very creative – inexpensive and/or recycled supplies can be used for art!
- Some examples of activities include: making sock puppets, DIY sand garden, feelings doodle (“if your feelings had a shape, what would they be?”), and relaxation jar (fill a jar with ideas of stress-reducing activities) (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).



Learn how to make a calming jar that could be used in your office as a therapist or for families to make at home, by clicking on the little guy!



Chapter 9 – Laugh to Relax, Then Laugh Some More



Laughter is the best medicine! Jokes, books, and funny movies are things that make children laugh. They are all also great stress relievers!

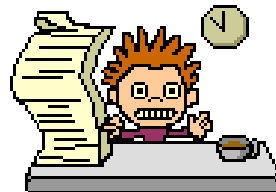
“Laughter lowers your blood pressure, lightens your mood, strengthens your immune system, and helps your body heal faster” (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009, p. 113).

Laughter makes people feel good, especially children and it is accepted as a form of treatment and recovery in mainstream medical establishments. Click on the clown to learn about Doc Willikers at BC Children’s Hospital.



How to support laughter?

- Make fun of stress: “I know I’m really stressed when I put juice in the cereal bowl” .
- Use clipart, stickers, and photo editors to make funny family photos.
- Have a family joke or crazy dress up night or make up silly stories
- Have a place in your home to post funny things.
- Play pranks on each other (click on this guy to learn some kid-friendly pranks).



Intervention Demonstration

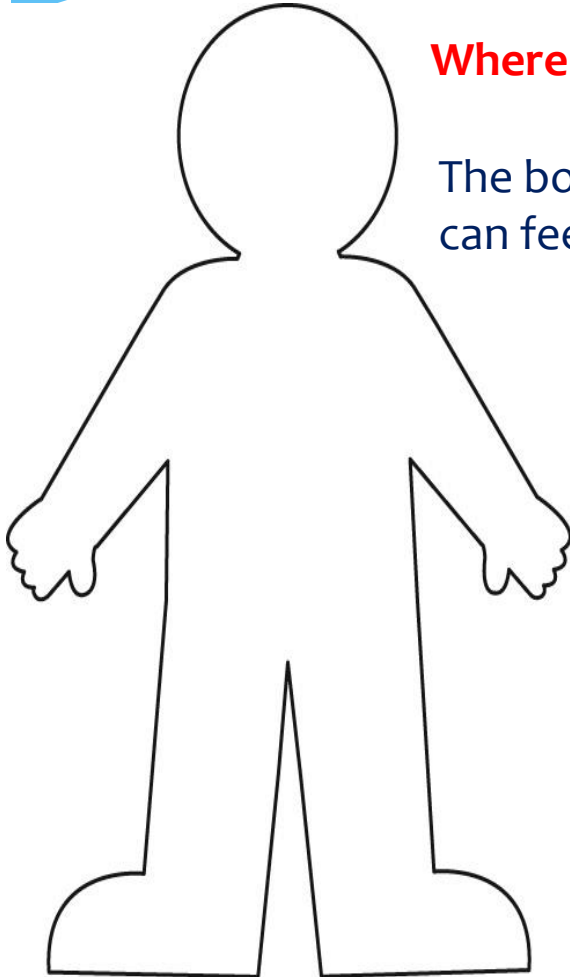
Where Do You Feel Stress?

The body has physiological responses to stress; sometimes children can feel stress in different places in their body (Shapiro & Sprague, 2009).

During the Summer Institute, we will share with the class a technique for helping children identify where they feel stress in their bodies. The technique draws from play, art, and cognitive behaviour therapy.

Helping children to identify where they feel stress in their bodies is helpful to:

- Identify triggers/ causes of stress
- Discuss feeling words and the body's reaction to those feelings
- Develop a treatment plan using movement (yoga), mindfulness, meditation, and deep breathing.



Conclusion



Anxiety is a common mental health concern that therapists see in children of all ages. Many researchers and clinicians are currently investigating and developing interventions to better support children in challenging times.

There are many techniques that therapists and parents can utilize in order to help children manage stress, anxiety, and transitions more easily, including:

- Helping parents manage their own stress
- Helping children understand the signs and symptoms of stress
- Calming breathing
- Guided Imagery
- Mindfulness
- Yoga
- Play
- Expressive arts
- Laughter.



Teaching children how to lead an active lifestyle, eat healthy, and relax are all important for supporting mental wellness in childhood and beyond.

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