

Let's think about...

DEALING WITH STRESS & ANXIETY



TLG transforming
lives for good



Let's think about **DEALING WITH STRESS & ANXIETY**

This booklet in the 'Let's think about...' series for supportive adults will focus on how the brain responds to different levels of anxiety.

We know that traumatic experiences in childhood can affect coping abilities and that children and young people can really struggle to survive when they feel alone.

We will look at some practical ways to bring connection and care for your children and young people as they journey with stressful and challenging circumstances.



THE 'LET'S THINK ABOUT...' BOOKLET SERIES FOR SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

has been created in collaboration with Safe Families and TLG.

Safe Families are a charity who know that facing life alone is hard and when you feel there is no one there to support you it is a scary place to be.

We offer support, hope and belonging to improve the lives of those in our communities. We link children, young people and families, with local volunteers who can offer them help and support.



TLG are a charity helping to bring a hope and a future for struggling children in communities by resourcing and equipping local church.

From crisis in education to poverty and hunger, there are children and young people across the UK facing some of the toughest starts in life.

We believe change is possible and that's why in all our work we are resolved to transform lives for good.



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Anxiety and **THE BRAIN**

When stress and worries grow, there is a lot going on in the brain.

This diagram shows the 3 main areas of the brain that activate in different ways depending on how much stress is being felt.

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

This too can be known as part of the 'Downstairs' brain with a keen awareness in RELATIONAL CONNECTION.

**LIMBIC
SYSTEM**

THINKING BRAIN

This can be known as the 'Upstairs' brain and works best when safety and connection are felt.

LET'S LOOK AT
OUR BRAIN

CORTEX

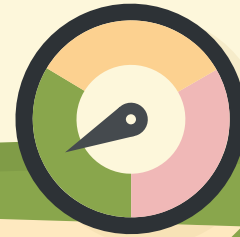
AUTOMATIC BRAIN

This also can be known as the 'Downstairs' brain with a keen awareness in SAFETY.

BRAIN
STEM

In the following pages we will look at what happens in these parts of the brain when we experience low, medium and large amounts of stress.

A LOW AMOUNT of stress and anxiety

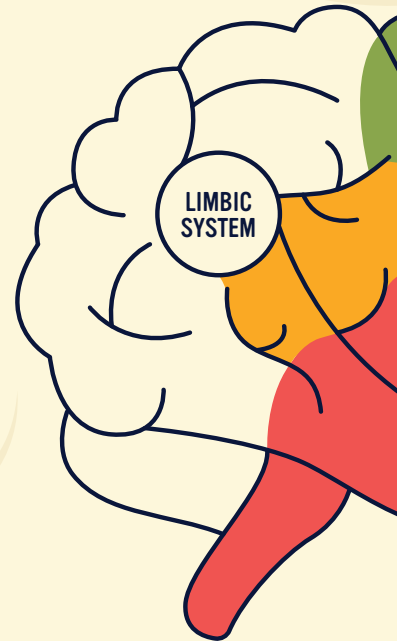


When there is little stress or anxiety the brain and nervous system are calm. This is the best kind of environment to learn and grow in.

EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

This part of the brain is calm because this person can connect positively with the people they are relating to.

EVERYTHING WE CAN DO TO
CREATE THIS SPACE FOR OUR
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
WILL HELP THEM TO BE IN A PLACE
TO REFLECT, LEARN, MATURE AND
DREAM FOR THEIR FUTURE.



THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain is engaged and inquisitive, wanting to learn and grow in skill and ability.

CORTEX

BRAIN
STEM

AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is calm because this person is feeling safe in the space they are in and the people they are with.

GOOD STRESS

Some stress can be good for us:

- Having an exam
- Giving a presentation
- Performing in front of others
- Speaking up
- Answering a question in front of others
- Giving an opinion
- Learning a new task
- Meeting new people

These stresses put our children and young people to the test, but the nerves they feel will be manageable when they are feeling **SAFE, CONNECTED** to others and **PREPARED** with good information.

In this good environment, mistakes can be made, accepted and seen as a way of learning even more.



A MEDIUM AMOUNT of stress and anxiety

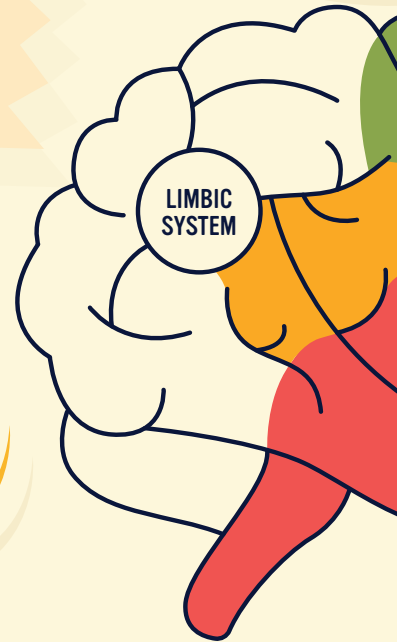


A medium amount of stress and anxiety can begin to feel overwhelming for our children and young people. They will be wanting to strengthen positive connections with those they care about because they feel the need for reassurance and protection.

EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

This part of the brain is alarmed and uncertain because this person is not feeling connected positively to the people they are with.

I'M HERE
WITH YOU



THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain has paused and the emotions are more activated which stops clear and objective thinking.

CORTEX

BRAIN
STEM

AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is on high alert because this person is not feeling safe in the space they are in and/or the people they are with.

Medium amounts of stress can be felt when children and young people are feeling physically or emotionally threatened.

This kind of anxiety can be felt when they don't receive the safety and reassurance they need from caring adults around them.

WHEN ADULTS ARE:

- Distracted
- Unable to give the consistent warm connection
- Absent
- Threatening
- Unpredictable

WHAT WILL HELP:

- Staying kind and connected
- Certainty
- Showing you're keeping them in mind
- Staying engaged

I FEEL REALLY ANXIOUS!

A LARGE AMOUNT of stress and anxiety



A large amount of stress can activate the brain and bodies automatic response system. This is because there will be a feeling of powerlessness and direct threat to themselves or their main caregiver. A threat that they perceive as life threatening.

EMOTIONAL (LIMBIC) BRAIN

This part of the brain is panicked and scared and may be feeling angry, shocked or numb.

LIMBIC
SYSTEM

I'M SO STRESSED
ALL OF THE TIME!

THINKING (CORTEX) BRAIN

This part of the brain will be 'off line' or disconnected with all energies used in the 'downstairs' brain areas.

CORTEX

BRAIN
STEM

AUTOMATIC (STEM) BRAIN

This part of the brain is actively switching on the automatic response systems which will cause this person to fight, run or freeze.

THE TYPES OF EXPERIENCES THAT CAN CAUSE A HUGE AMOUNT OF STRESS AND ANXIETY:

- Permanent separation from main care giver
- Long term separation from main care giver
- Ongoing physical harm
- Ongoing bullying – mental or physical
- Life threatening circumstances
- Lack of strong bond with a warm, caring, safe adult.

WHAT WILL HELP:

- Commitment to safety
- Reassurance of safety
- Consistent quality caring time every day
- Times given to talk about worries
- Lots of 'together' time with an emotionally healthy, supportive adult
- Safe calm spaces to process emotions



HOW TO RESPOND to each amount of stress felt

It can be helpful, when it comes to stress levels, to think about the 3 areas of the brain like traffic light signals. When we know a little of what to look for and how to listen to our children and young people, we can then respond well to their needs.

RED - When they're Panicked
AMBER - When they are Alarmed
GREEN - When they are Calm

EMOTIONS ARE LIKE SIGNALS

When we see the emotions our children and young people are feeling, they are like flares, or signals from the soul. They let us know how they are doing and if there is something we need to be more aware of or tend to.





LA LA LA! NOT LISTENING!

BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION

We can often respond to the emotional signals or behaviours first and forget to remember that there is a reason for them.

The emotions and actions give helpful clues to what they feel behind the behaviour.

When children and young people respond with aggressive words or actions, withdrawing or being uncooperative you can:

- Take a breath or two
- Ask yourself what are they really feeling?
- Respond first to the feeling *"I can see you're really feeling it."*, *"I'm seeing this is hard for you."*
- Help them see you understand: *"It's understandable that you're feeling that way."*



Let's have a look at what signals we might see when different levels of stress are being felt.

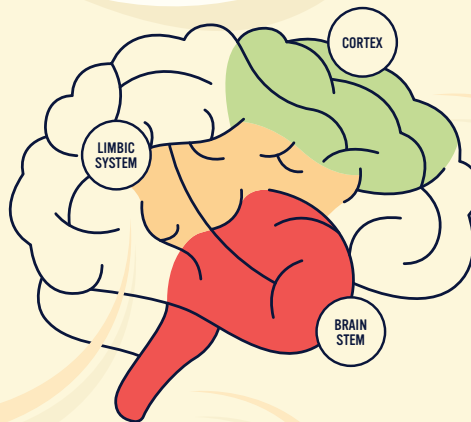
RED

When they're in Panic

When a child and young person is feeling a huge amount of stress and anxiety they can often feel panicked and respond with fight, flight or freeze reactions.

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feeling **NUMB/**
RAGE/PANICKED,
needing someone
to step in to bring
safety, calm
and care.



THINKING BRAIN

Is switched off.

AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

ACTIVE and switches on the nervous
system so that both automatically
respond with fighting, running away
or switching off.



SIGNALS

FIGHT



Fight with words or actions
Aggressive
Angry
Agitated

FLIGHT

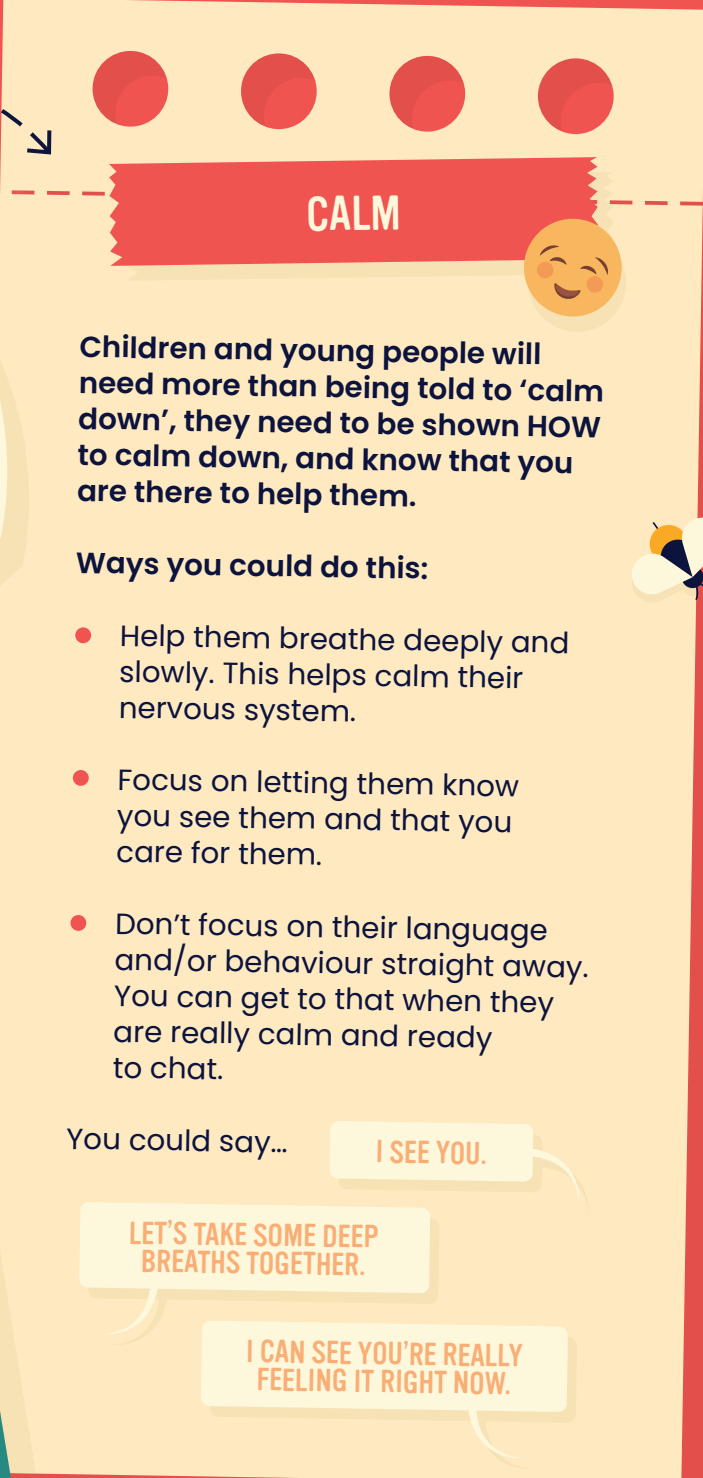
Running off from a place or person
Avoiding a place or person
Overly obsessed with a toy/game/book
for distraction

FREEZE

Switched off/closed down
Not engaging/very tired
Self-harm
Panic attacks



Helpful
**CALM, CONNECT
AND CONSIDER**
Responses



CALM

Children and young people will need more than being told to 'calm down', they need to be shown HOW to calm down, and know that you are there to help them.

Ways you could do this:

- Help them breathe deeply and slowly. This helps calm their nervous system.
- Focus on letting them know you see them and that you care for them.
- Don't focus on their language and/or behaviour straight away. You can get to that when they are really calm and ready to chat.

You could say...

I SEE YOU.

LET'S TAKE SOME DEEP
BREATHS TOGETHER.

I CAN SEE YOU'RE REALLY
FEELING IT RIGHT NOW.

CONNECT

As you help them breathe, another way that can bring calm is by staying connected to them through calm time just 'being' together still or actively doing something that engages their senses.

Ways you can do this:

- Sit with them.
- Go for a walk with them (long or quick) – sometimes moving away from the room or space you're in can really help.
- Get a drink or snack together – an activity that engages as many of their senses as possible.



You could say...

I'M HERE FOR YOU.

I CARE ABOUT YOU.

I CARE ABOUT HOW YOU'RE FEELING.

CONSIDER

Only when your child or young person is safe and connected with you, can they then feel able to talk about what is going on for them. It is helpful to listen to them first, so that they can feel heard and involved in what happens next.

Ways you can do this:

- Listen with an open mind.
- Accept their emotions and their side of things.
- Don't assume you know what they're thinking.
- Repeat back what you've heard from them – to check you've understood.
- Share your thoughts and make a plan of response to anyone/anything together.

You could say...

I HEAR YOU.

I'M LISTENING, I WANT TO UNDERSTAND.

TELL ME IF I'VE GOT THIS RIGHT...

AMBER

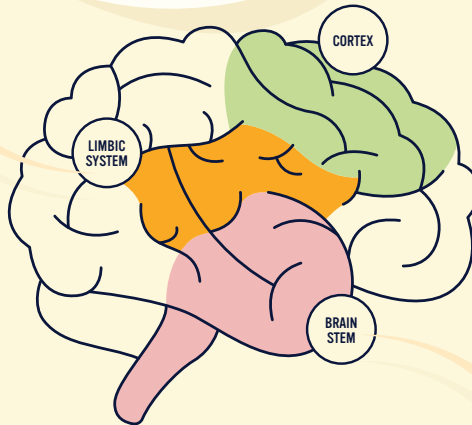
When they are Alarmed

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feeling **ALARMED** and **SCARED** and needing reassurance that they are positively connected to those they care about.

THINKING BRAIN

Feels **PAUSED** as the emotions are more activated which stops clear thinking.



AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

On **HIGH ALERT** because they don't feel safe.



SIGNALS

ACTING OUT



Wanting everyone to do
what they say

Angry outbursts

Can't sit still

Needing to be the
centre of attention

Stamping

Crying

Trying to get your attention
in a physical way

Giddy

WITHDRAWING

Going off by themselves

Blending in to
the background

Often tired

Floppy

Struggles to concentrate

Hides away

Not very talkative

Distracted





Helpful CALM, CONNECT AND CONSIDER Responses



CALM



You can do this by helping your child or young person in developing ways of HOW to find calm.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Acknowledge that we all feel big emotions at times and that it's understandable.
- Create a 'Sensory Bag' together, thinking about how to include all of their senses, to help them feel calmer.

Stress ball

Fidget toy

BlueTac

Play dough

Moisturiser for hand massage

pad and pens

Calming playlist to listen to

Small puzzle cube or snake

Pictures of people important to them

You could say:

I CAN SEE YOU'RE FEELING
FRUSTRATED, I'M HERE TO LISTEN.

Wonder out loud:

I WONDER IF YOU'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT
YOUR GRANDMA IN HOSPITAL...IT'S REALLY
NORMAL TO FEEL UNCERTAIN AND WORRIED.

CONNECT

Staying connected can really help your child or young person feel able to face the challenges and worries they face. Keeping things relational will be a valuable support for them.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Create, make or do something together?
- Give a warm drink or snack to them.
- Give them a hand written note of encouragement to show you're thinking about them.
- Listen to music together – talk about the lyrics and what you each like about them.
- Do an object swap so that you have something of theirs to keep and they have something of yours to keep until you see each other again.



CONSIDER

When your child or young person is feeling calm and connected with you, they can then feel safe enough to talk about what is going on for them.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Listen with an open mind to what they have to say.
- Hear them out.
- Create a Worry bag or box – write and draw the things they are anxious about.
- Make a Thankful bag or box to write and draw the things they're glad about.
- Play games that help them name the emotions they feel.



You could say...

**I ENJOY HEARING
YOUR THOUGHTS.**

**THAT WAS AN INTERESTING
CONVERSATION, THANK YOU.**

GREEN

When they are Calm

Feed their Interests with information
and skilful development

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Feels **CONNECTED**
positively with
those they are
relating to.



THINKING BRAIN

Feels **ENGAGED**
and **INQUISITIVE**,
wanting to learn
and be stretched.

AUTOMATIC RESPONSE BRAIN

Feels **SAFE** in the space they are in
and the people they are with.



SIGNALS

CALM



Relaxed
Enjoying learning or creating
Inquisitive
Open about feelings
Reflective

ENGAGED

Have areas of interest
Hobbies
Physical activity
Sociable with adults
Sociable with peers

ALERT

Able to handle a little stress
Interest is stronger than nerves
Pressures coped with
Able to ask for help





Helpful **CALM, CONNECT AND CONSIDER** Responses

When they are calm, they
are in the best place to
learn, reflect and grow.



CALM



**Keep the calm going by feeding
their interests and knowledge.**

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- What are they interested in? – bring experiences that fuel their curiosity
- Look for clubs, books, films to increase their interest and skill.
- Give them sensory items like soft blankets and toys or cushions.
- Colouring, sorting, puzzle solving or anything repetitive.

You could say...

TELL ME MORE ABOUT...

**WHAT ARE YOUR
THOUGHTS ABOUT...**



CONNECT

Keep the connection going by continuing to bring emotional support by offering time to chat and time for activities you enjoy together.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Watch a film together
- Look through their Worry bag or Thankful bag together and talk about any the child or young person is willing to chat about.
- Play a game together.
- Take time to check in with them about big emotions they've felt recently.



You could say...

HOW ARE YOU
FEELING TODAY?



CONSIDER

Take time to reflect together on interests and knowledge they would like to develop in. Explore ways to handle the big emotions they feel sometimes.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Make a plan together about how to deal with the emotions they're feeling
- Who do they feel able to chat to and what helps calm them?
- Where can they go to get space if needed?
- Let them dream and hope for their future – hear their thoughts.

You could say...

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO
DO WHEN YOU'RE OLDER?

WHAT HAVE YOU REALLY
ENJOYED TODAY?

Helpful Personal Reflection

NOTES

What emotional signals in children and young people do I sometimes misread?

1.
2.
3.
4.

How can I respond when that happens?

.....

What behaviours from children and young people trigger me sometimes?

1.
2.
3.
4.

How can I respond when that happens?

.....

My notes + thoughts

FOR YOUR INTEREST...

Themes and responses in this booklet have been drawn from the work of specialists who have written these books:

Conversations That Matter

By Dr Margot Sunderland

Know Me to Teach Me

By Louise Bombér

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog

By Dr Bruce Perry

The Body Keeps The Score

By Bessel Van Der Kolk

**The Simple Guide to Understanding
Shame in Children**

By Betsey De Thierry

The Whole Brain Child

by Dr Daniel Siegal and Dr Tina Payne Bryson

*Also look up via a search engine –
Dr Daniel Siegal Hand Brain*







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Safe Families

by Rae Morfin and Fiona Eve

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