

Rethinking Parenting Anxious Kids

Flint Hill School
April-May, 2024

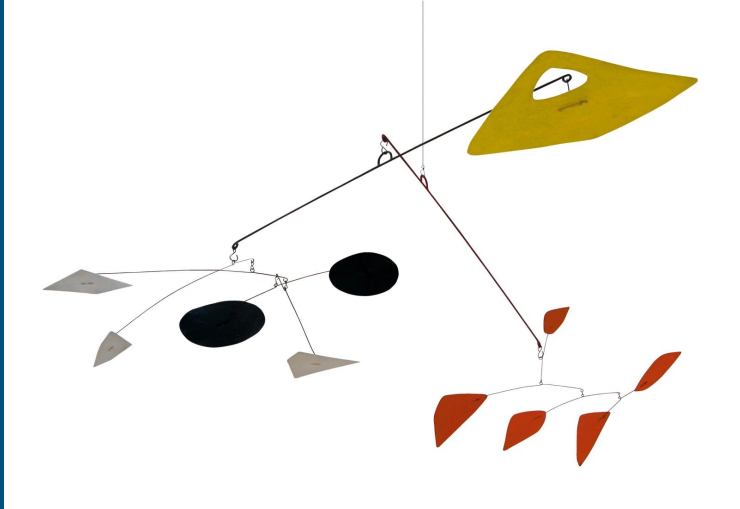
Jennifer Weaver, LCSW & Amy Killy, LCSW



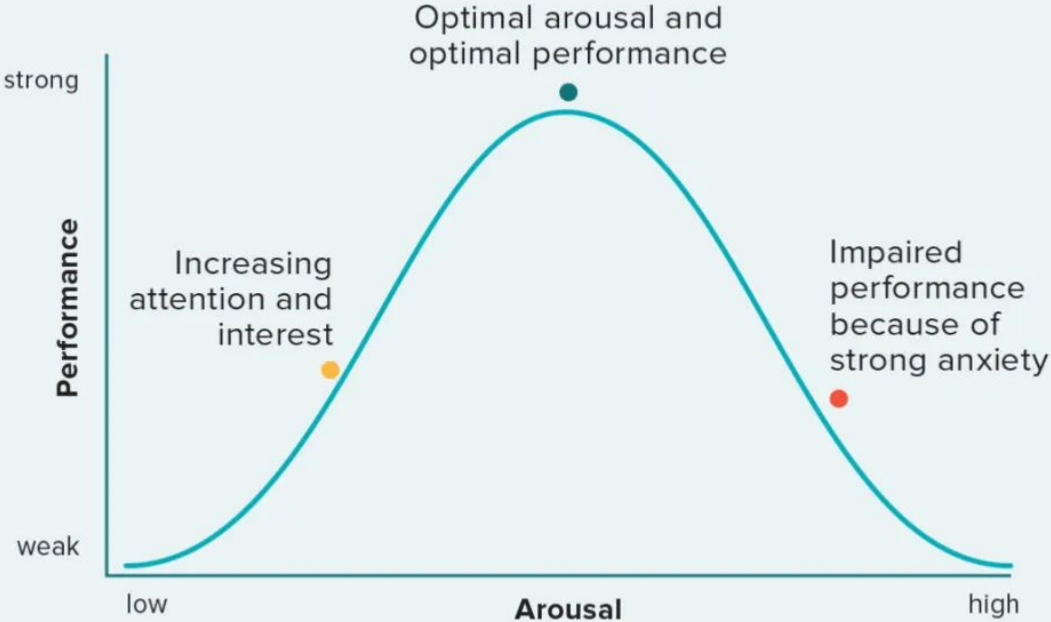


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www.spacetreatment.net

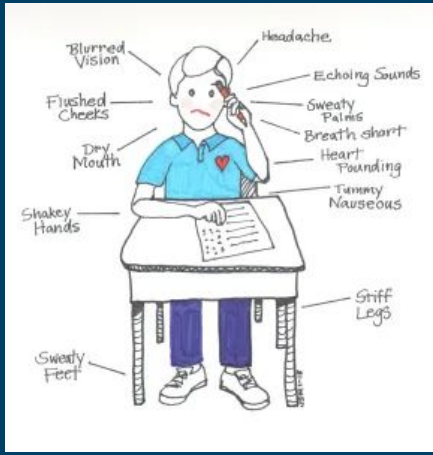


YERKES-DODSON LAW BELL CURVE



healthline

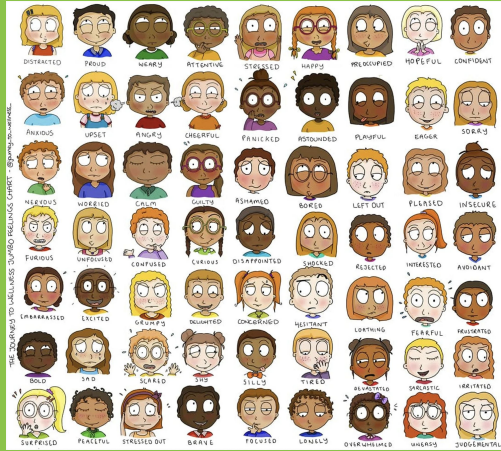
Physical Manifestations



Anxious Thoughts



Feelings



Behaviors

8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

- 1. Anger**
The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.
- 2. Difficulty Sleeping**
In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.
- 3. Defiance**
Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.
- 4. Chandeliering**
Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment, or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.
- 5. Lack of Focus**
Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.
- 6. Avoidance**
Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.
- 7. Negativity**
People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.
- 8. Overplanning**
Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.





CHILDHOOD ANXIETY = FEAR + RESPONSE FROM PARENT



WWW.RaisingAKidWhoCan.com

Illustration by Workman Publishing / Sarah Letteney

Two main changes adults learn to make in SPACE:

1. To respond more supportively to anxious children
 2. To reduce accommodations they have been making to the child's symptoms
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Supportive Statements



Supportive Statements



Supportive Statements



COMMON PITFALLS

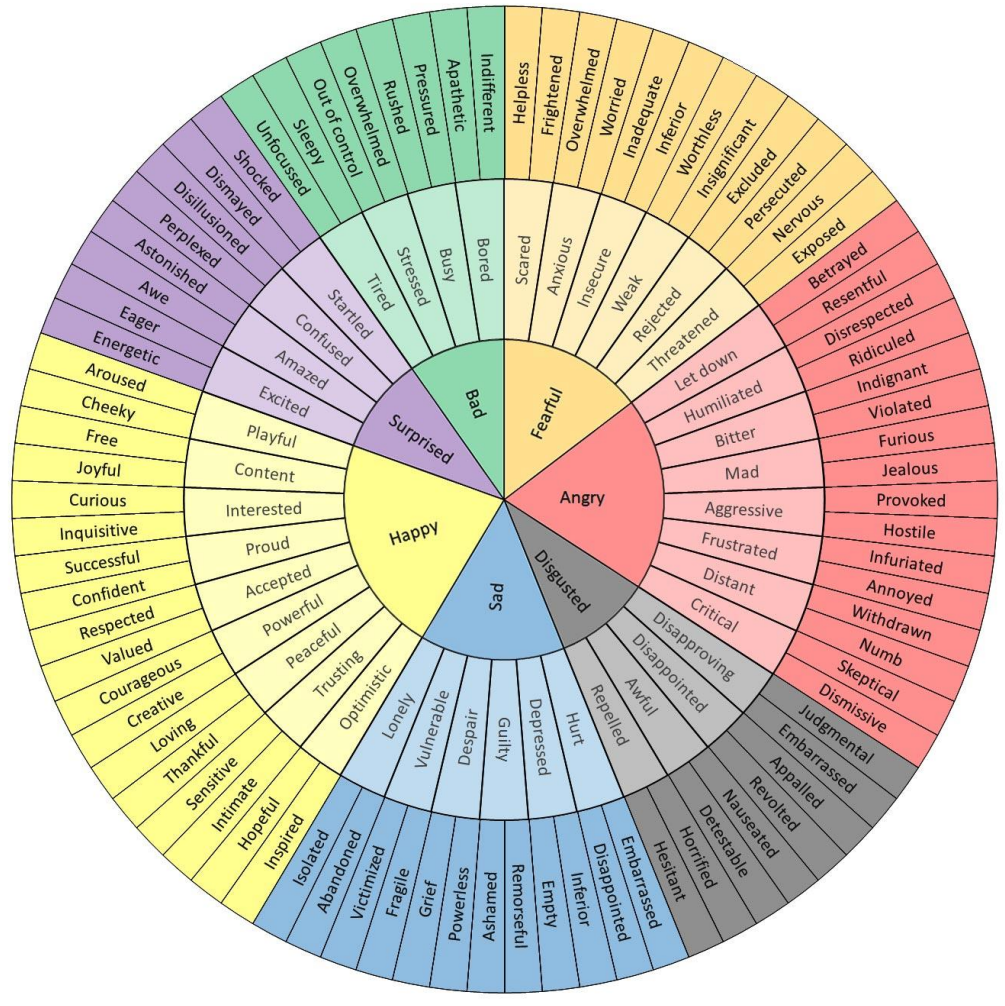
Protection

Demanding



Supportive Statements





Supportive Statements

CHILDHOOD ANXIETY =
FEAR + RESPONSE FROM ADULT



*None
Matters*



Confidence is about
managing the fear,
not the thing itself

WHAT'S THE
MESSAGE?



Say it Once

Accommodation



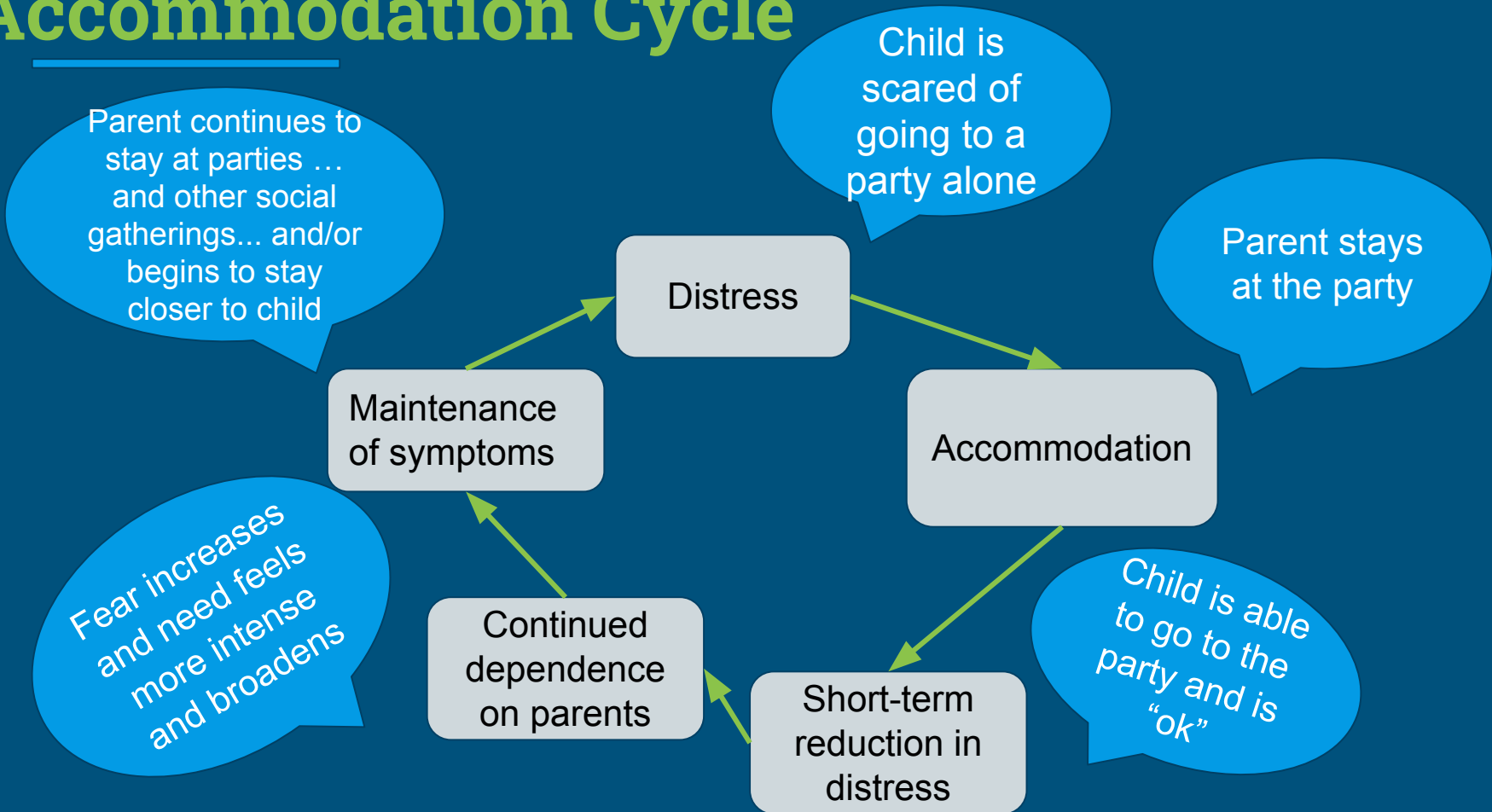
Terminology: Accommodation is a behavior that parents use to help children manage or lessen feelings of anxious

a word

about

reassurances

Accommodation Cycle



Accommodation... Or Not?

- ▶ Do you do this with all your children?
- ▶ Would you like to be able to stop this behavior?
- ▶ If your child were not so anxious would you still do this?
- ▶ What would happen if you did not do this one day?

Chip Away... One Small Slice At A Time



Choosing a Target and an Accommodation to Reduce

- ↪ **Pick Something That HAPPENS FREQUENTLY**
 - Fear of getting carsick is a better target than fear of flying.
- ↪ **Pick Something YOU CAN CONTROL**
 - The change should not involve any change on the child's part.
 - Ex: not answering the phone at work or not checking the locks
- ↪ **Pick Something That BOTHERS YOU**
 - Something that limits the child's independence or parents' daily routine

Informing Your Child



This is an
ANNOUNCEMENT,
not a conversation,
negotiation or a
contract

The Announcement Template

WRITING YOUR ANNOUNCEMENT

Use this template to formulate your announcement

Start with a warm opening statement. Include a positive thing you've noticed recently in your child

(e.g., Dear John, we love you so much and are so proud of how you...)

Continue with a sentence describing the area of anxiety or worry you have noticed them struggling with

(e.g., We know that you feel anxious when we are in social situations and people ask you questions...)

State how your behavior (the accommodations) have not helped them overcome their anxiety

(e.g., We now realize that our behavior – talking in your place, ordering for you at restaurants – has not helped you overcome your worries...)

Now describe the changed you intend to make in your behavior (the specific accommodation reductions)

(e.g., Therefore, we have decided that from now on we will not talk in your place. We will not order for you in restaurants and when people ask you questions, we will not answer instead of you)

End with a supportive statement

(e.g., This may sound hard at first, but we are 100% sure you can handle it; this is not a punishment because you did nothing wrong. This is our way of helping you overcome your worries)

Love, Mom and Dad

The Announcement Template

Start with a warm opening statement.
Include a positive thing you've noticed
recently in your child.

*Dear John, We love you so much and are so
proud of how you...*

The Announcement Template

Continue with a sentence describing the area of anxiety or worry you have noticed them struggling with.

We know you feel anxious when we're in out and people ask you questions...

The Announcement Template

State how your behavior (the accommodations) have not helped them overcome their anxiety

We now realize that our behavior - talking in your place, ordering for you at restaurants - has not helped you overcome your worries...

The Announcement Template

Now describe the changes you intend to make in your behavior (the specific accommodation reductions)

Therefore, we have decided that from now on we will not talk in your place: We will not order for you in restaurants and when people ask you questions, we will not answer instead of you.

The Announcement Template

End with a supportive statement.

This may sound hard at first, but we are 100% sure you can handle it; this is not a punishment because you did nothing wrong. This is our way of helping you overcome your worries.

Sometimes, it can
be challenging

*The less you respond, the more
quickly the emotion will subside!*



Sometimes, it can
be challenging

The Plan is for YOU!

*You're just offering them a courtesy
by sharing it with them.*

they may not listen to you



Sometimes, it can
be challenging

Remember supportive statements.

*Accommodations may alleviate
anxiety over short-term.
This about the long game.*

they may become anxious or upset



Sometimes, it can
be challenging

*Anger or aggression
is a manifestation of the anxiety.*

they may get angry



Sometimes, it can
be challenging

Disengaging = De-escalating

they may argue



Sometimes, it can be challenging

*Children don't feel love by
getting what they want,
they feel love by getting what
they need.*

they may try emotional blackmail



Two Helpful Strategies...



* DISENGAGE

* SUPPORTERS



THE SHRUG



- ★ Technique for modeling how to tolerate big feelings
 - ★ The formula:
 - 1 Validate the feeling
 - 2 Shrug
 - ★ Do it kindly, not snarkily.
-

CHILDHOOD ANXIETY = FEAR + RESPONSE FROM ADULT



WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

Take Aways...

ACCEPTANCE
VALIDATION
+
CONFIDENCE
=
SUPPORT



Pay attention to the present while focused on the future



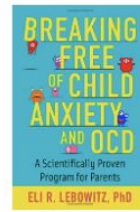
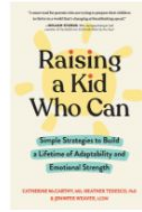
Managing Anxious Students (and Their Parents)

While Fostering Resilience and Growth

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Howard County Public School System

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[Fall 2022 Dr. Jonathan Dalton](#)

[Fall 2022 Slides](#)



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