

SUPPORTING PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR TEENAGERS

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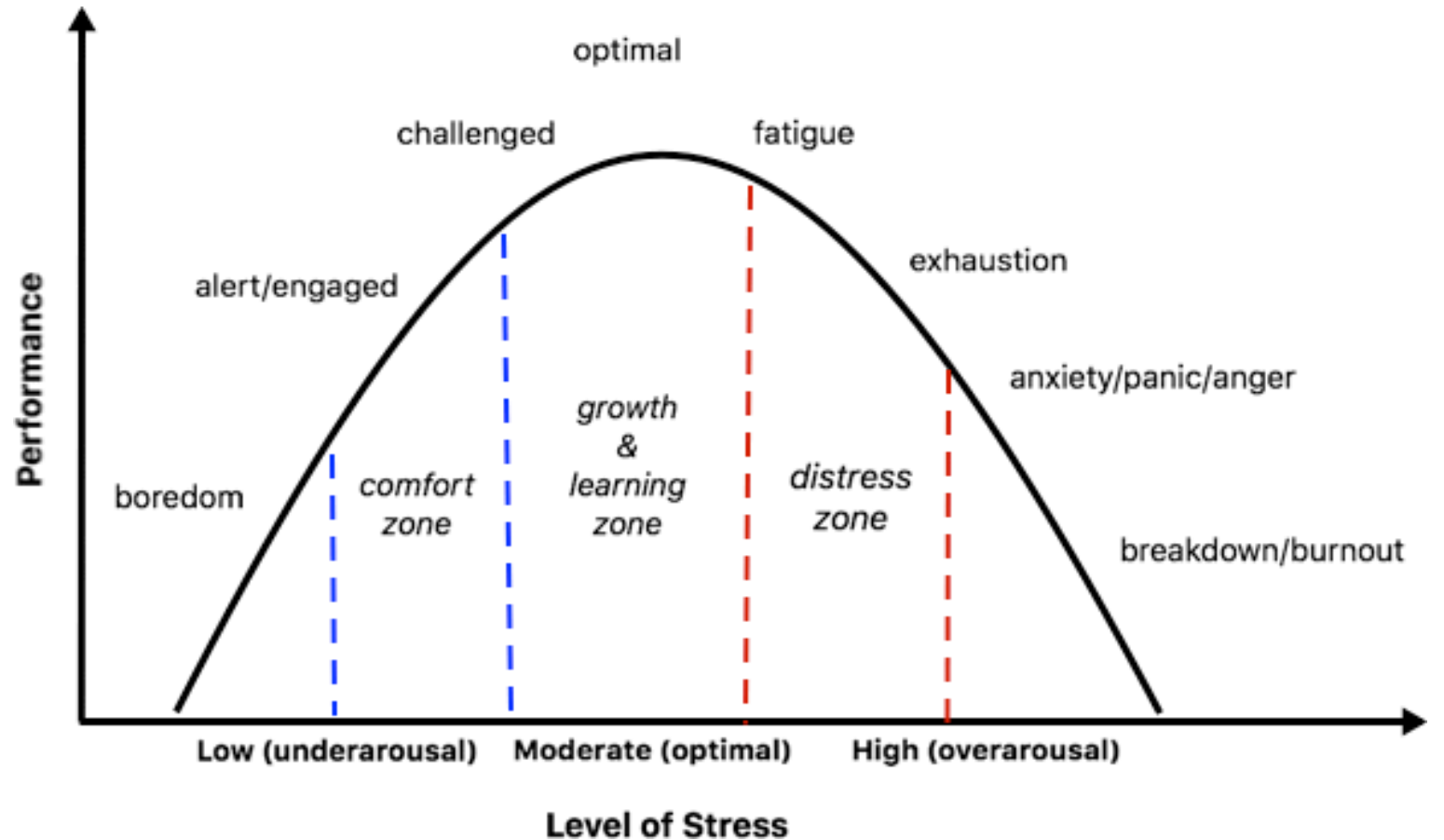
What we will cover:

- * Stress
- * The role of parents in supporting their child experiencing stress/anxiety
- * Supporting your child to avoid Unhelpful behaviours and engage in Helpful behaviours

Sources:

- Cool Kids Anxiety Program, Centre for Emotional Health and Wellbeing, Macquarie University
- SafeMinds, Headspace and VIC Dept Ed

What is
Stress and is
it always
bad for
you?



Fight or Flight Response to perceived threat (Sympathetic and Parasympathetic nervous system)

Blood clotting ability increases to prepare for possible injury

Mind becomes alert

Muscles tense ready for action: can lead to muscle tension

Sweating increases to help cool the body

Breathing rate increases: can lead to tightness in chest, dizziness

Blood is redirected to the legs and arms

Stomach upset as energy is redirected away from digestion



Common Physical symptoms you may experience with stress

- Heart rate may go up
- agitated and tense
- Shallow breathing
- Emotional dysregulation – cry/anger/irritability
- constant fatigue
- difficulty concentrating
- sleep problems
- headaches
- Stomach problems/pain
- jaw pain



Unhelpful Behaviours your child may engage in

- Perfectionism
- Poor Time Management, eg being late to school
- Over Commitment
- Unorganised
- Poor Life/Work Balance
- Over/Under/Badly eating
- Stay up late/lose sleep
- Self-handicapping Behaviours:
 - Procrastination, sabotage, avoidance

When under a lot of stress females tend to use **goal directed activity (+)** to reduce stress, males increase **self-handicapping behaviours (-)**

Your child has some control over their unhelpful behaviours– using practical tips and cognitive reframing (CBT) can help them reduce these behaviours



Exposure

Exposure is the most important technique we can use to reduce anxiety, stress and fearfulness (important component of CBT along with Realistic/Detective thinking)

Exposure involves:

- the child facing the situation, context or object s/he fears, repeatedly and extensively, in order to learn nothing bad happens and the situation/context/object is 'safe'

The importance of failing (and learning from failing) – school is a very safe and supportive environment eg, teachers, DPs, counsellors, Student Support Officers, Careers Advisers.

Parenting Traps

There are a number of different parenting traps:

- 1. Providing too much reassurance** - A parent's response to his or her child can, unintentionally, help maintain anxiety
- 2. Jumping in too soon** – Again this is very well intentioned but in the long term will lead to more anxiety for their child.
- 3. Allowing avoidance** - A key factor in maintaining anxiety is AVOIDANCE of the feared situation.
- 4. Being too tough** – support and gradual exposure
- 5. Letting emotions get in the way** - Parent anxiety and their poor coping may increase their child's anxiety as they are important role models.

Changing the conversation

1. Listen empathically to your child – say you understand
 2. Acknowledge the emotion and reflect back to your child what you have heard – active listening
 3. Find a common language between yourself and your child
 4. Give the child space to talk
 5. Do not solve the problem for them or fix it
 6. Provide examples and role play if necessary - teach the child new skills and new ways of managing the situation
 7. Parents can see this as an opportunity to teach their child ways of managing emotion
- Reassurance teaches a child that a situation is only safe if someone else says so (reduce reassurance gradually)
 - A change in conversation can teach your children to evaluate situations by themselves

Effective ways to Give Feedback

1. Be honest (do not exaggerate or be critical)
2. Be Specific (describe exactly what you noted)
3. Be Focused (restrict to one or two points)
4. Be constructive (highlight the positives and the changes that are possible)

Help your child replace negative thinking (I cannot do this) with realistic thinking (this makes me nervous but I will be ok).



Praise and Feedback

1. The more you pay attention to a behaviour the more it will increase
2. Parents should shift their focus to their child/teen's brave behaviours
3. Consider timing of praise
4. Attention: specific, labelled praise - make sure praise is specific and labelled, honest, sincere and focused (no not over-inflate)
5. Cream biscuit: positive comments on either side of constructive feedback.

Building independence and confidence

1. Goal as a parent is to help create deliberate opportunities for our children to practice independence (stepladders)
2. Sit back and do not rush in - what could my child learn if I didn't help him/her (or didn't solve it)
3. Its not about being harsh or unloving – rather guidance (stepladders and scaffolds)

Examples – allow your teenager to control their own work experience placement, subject selection for HSC, UAC registration for University – this will be excellent preparation for managing their own administration at university, tafe and/or work and life in general!

Natural Consequences

Your child/teen needs to be responsible for the consequences that flow from their anxious behaviour.

Eg. Pulling out of party they need to let their friend/parent know they won't be coming. Left Library book at home, do not take it to them when they ask, let them take it the next day.

If there is a natural consequence to an undesirable anxious behaviour, then the parent should let their child experience this without protecting them

Being organised

Your child will benefit in the early years of High School from understanding the importance of being organised and being on time to class.

Establishing good habits early is the key.

Your role as a parent:

- Coach and support your child to organise themselves for school the night before
- Do not do the organising for them - support and talk them through the process
- Have a check-list they can refer to, and remind them every morning to check this list
- Important – your child is actually learning the skills of **organisation, planning and even problem solving.**

Being late or absent from school

- Sometimes absences from school or being late is unavoidable for your child.
- But regular or consistent lateness and/or absences should raise a red flag as a parent.
- There is extensive research to show that students who start being consistently late or missing classes in the early years of High School, continue to do so in the Senior years, with a detrimental effect on their HSC results.
- Consistent lateness and/or absences leads to disrupted Learning both for the student who is late but also the classes they enter late.
- Several studies have shown that school tardiness has a negative impact on learning outcomes. (https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/the-effect-of-student-tardiness-on-learning)

Moving through High School - Adolescents

Parents of adolescents are the support crew or the cheer squad – encourage more independence over time.

As your child moves through high-school:

1. Parent as support crew only
 2. Aim is to enhance communication between parent and teen
 3. Parents need to provide honest, specific, constructive feedback and teach each other to listen and be respectful.
- Parents role is to push their child just enough to keep them progressing towards independence and confidence, whilst supporting them eg. Drive them somewhere if needed

What is happening for you (the parent)

- Try and understand your own anxiety or emotion (as a parent). Sometimes it can unwittingly increase your child's own anxiety/fears.
- It is important to stay calm and relaxed.
- As a parent you are role modelling how to manage difficult situations and think things through to your child.
- Gain support from your partner, other parents or friends to help you effectively support your child.

Summary - as a parent you should:

1. Allow your child's fears to be faced gradually and systematically
2. Allow your child to feel the discomfort , they may not want to but they need to do it anyway to learn the situation is safe.
3. Understand the role you play as a parent when you react to your child's anxiety. You may think you are helping the situation but may be unintentionally maintaining your child's anxiety.
4. Your child needs their anxiety acknowledged but can then be encouraged to deal with the situation (therefore important how parents discuss fear and worry).
5. Rewards are important to motivate a child/teenager to face their fears.
6. Build your child's independence by not intervening and allow natural consequences to build their resilience

Your aim is not to eliminate all anxiety but to reduce to manageable and healthy levels.

Reminder –
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engage in

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Helpful Behaviours that can help reduce stress:

Challenge unhelpful thinking

e.g. “I Can’t do this”, “Others are writing more than me”, “ I won’t be able to remember anything”, etc.

Help your child apply realistic thinking to the stressors in their life (school work or otherwise)

Help your child set and keep Goals to help stay on track.

Help your child get organised and maintain it – life skills, eg. Planning and punctuality using timetables or relevant apps.

Make sure your child keeps balance in their life – a lot of evidence to show that your brain will work better if you rest and recharge. **Protect your sleep and eat balanced meals. Both can be particularly important during assessment periods.**

Exercise - Use up cortisol (stress hormone) by making exercise a priority – encourage your child to go for a run/walk/play a sport with friends.

Stay connected – ensure your child makes time to see family and friends

Breath deeply and be mindful – anxiety and stress occur mostly when you live in the future



One of the best ways you can support your child –

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Get ready for school	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
8am	Get ready for school	Get up / ready	Get ready for school	School – Early class	Get ready for school		Get up / ready
		Study – Free period					
9am	School	School	School		School	Get up / ready	TV
10am						Soccer	
		School					
11am							Snack
							Study / homework
Noon				School			
1pm						Lunch	Lunch
2pm						Study / homework	Piano practice

Help them get organised



QUESTIONS

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