

Hello Anxiety

Understanding Anxiety and ways to support your child

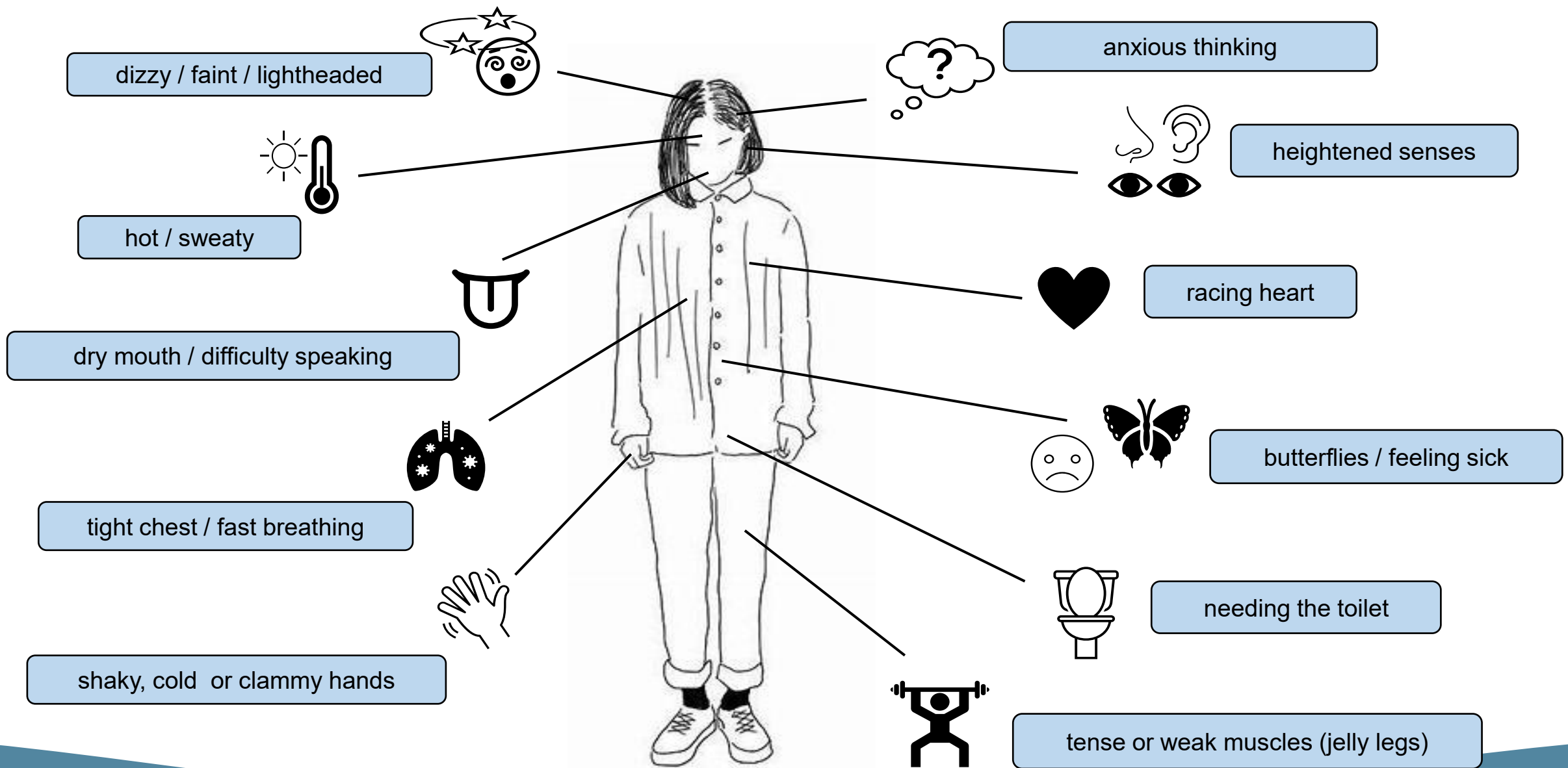


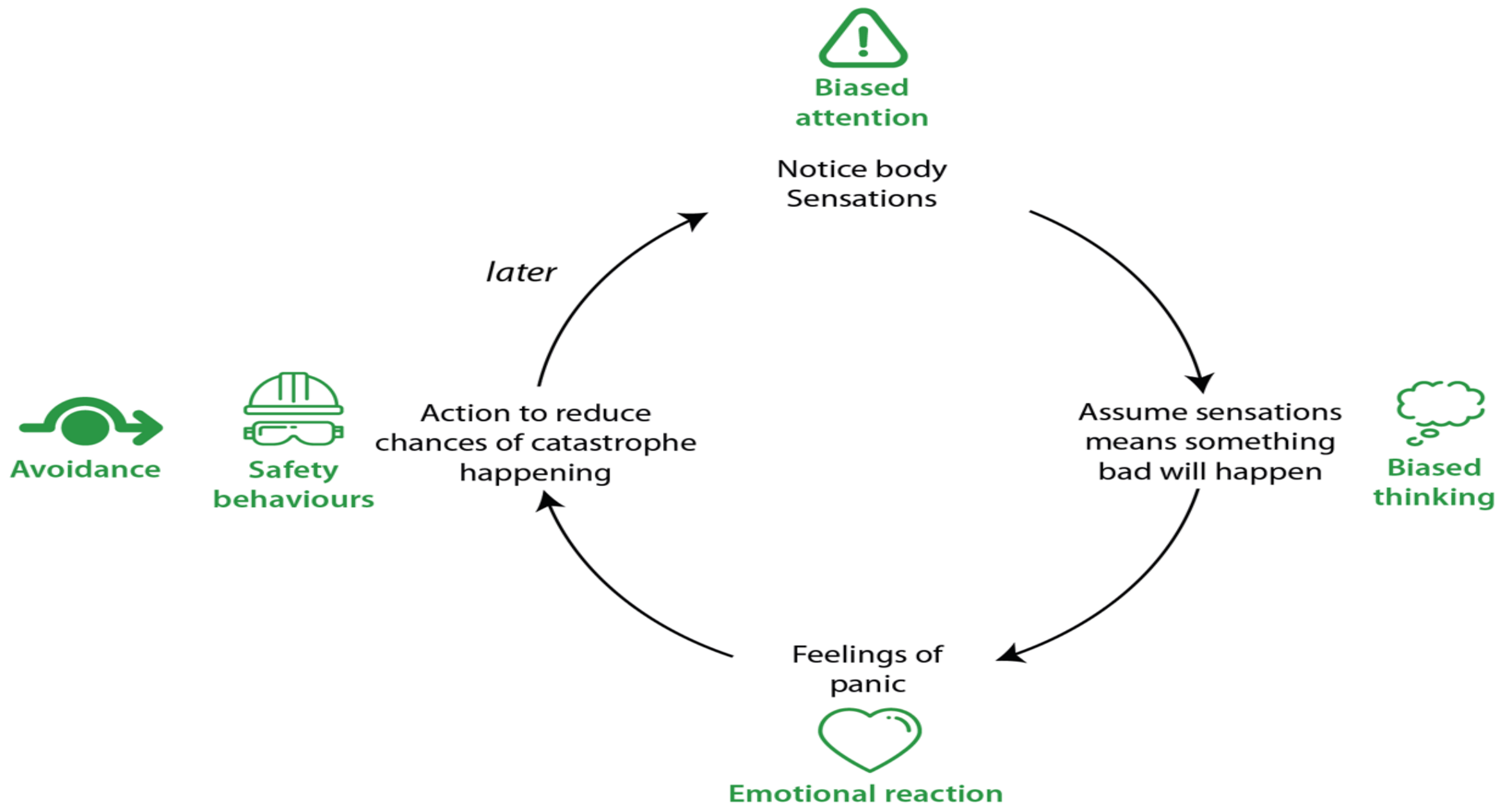
What is Anxiety

Anxiety is the mind and body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations. It's the sense of uneasiness, distress, or dread you feel before a significant event.

Lower levels of anxiety can be helpful but prolonged anxiety can impact our health and wellbeing

Physical symptoms of anxiety





But why do we experience anxiety?

Anxiety is a defence mechanism designed to keep us safe.

When we perceive danger our internal alarm system in the brain triggers our **Fight or Flight** response

Sometimes, the system gets confused and mistakes perceived danger for real danger.



<https://cbt4panic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-anxiety-cure-cbt4panic-fight-flight-response.png>

What FFF might look like

Fight can look like:

- Clenched fist
- Aggression slamming/throwing objects
- Screaming/yelling
- Answering back
- Glaring



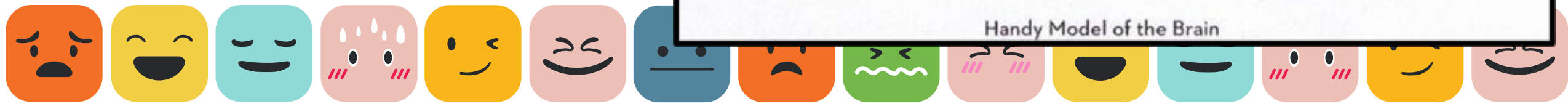
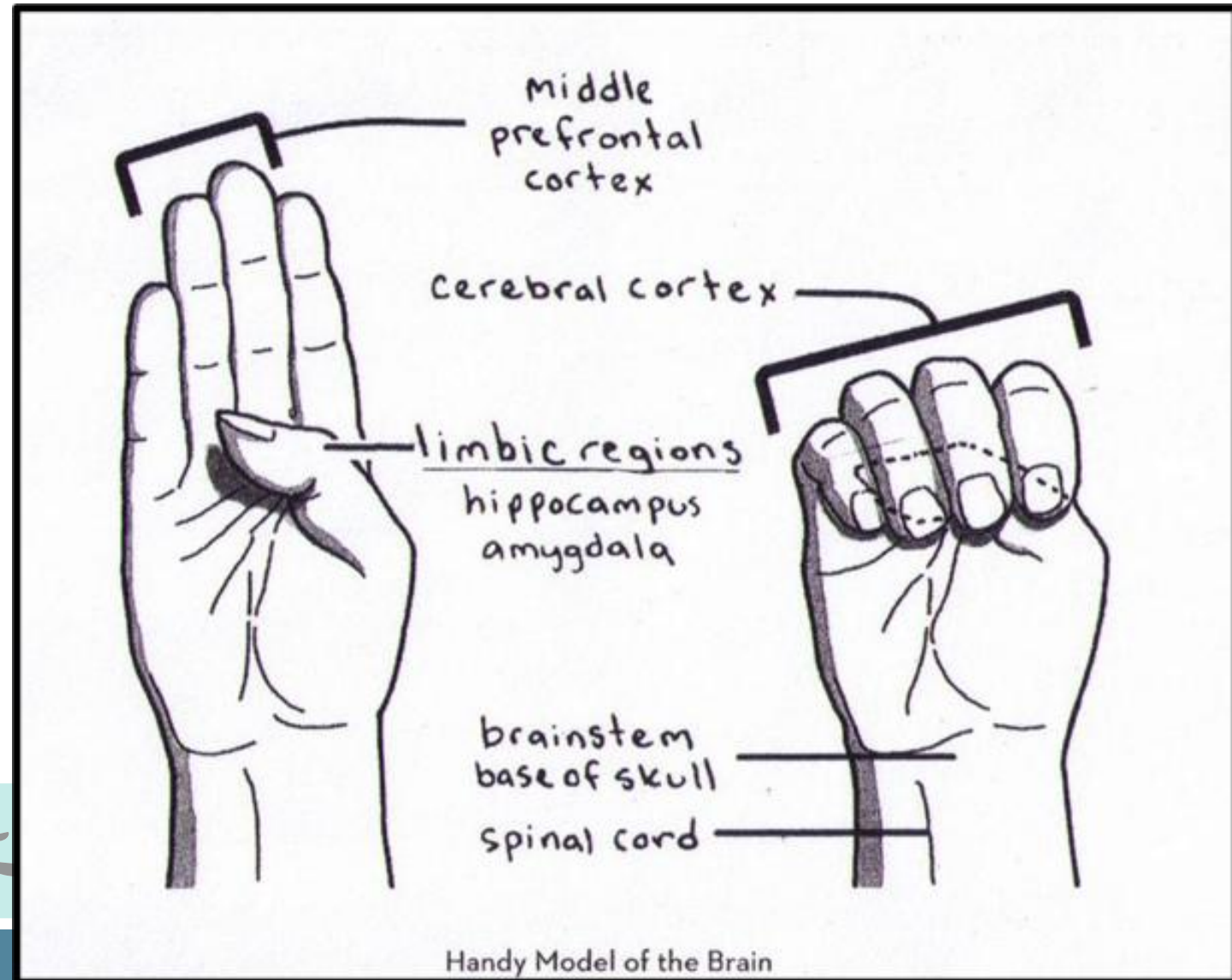
Flight can look like:

- Restlessness
- Excessive fidgeting
- Walking away
- Running without concern for his own safety

Freeze can look like:

- Mute
- Shutting down
- Feeling unable to move
- Feeling numb
- Forgetful/distant
- Daydreaming

Underlying Psychology #1 : Hand Brain Model



Brain Matters... *(the science bit)*

Brain stem/Reptilian brain/Ancient brain/Survival Brain

Responsible for keeping you alive. It controls basic body functions like:

- Heart rate
- Breathing
- Body temperature
- Sleep/wake cycle
- Immune system
- Freeze response
- Movement

Limbic system/ Emotional Brain/Mid-brain/Monkey brain

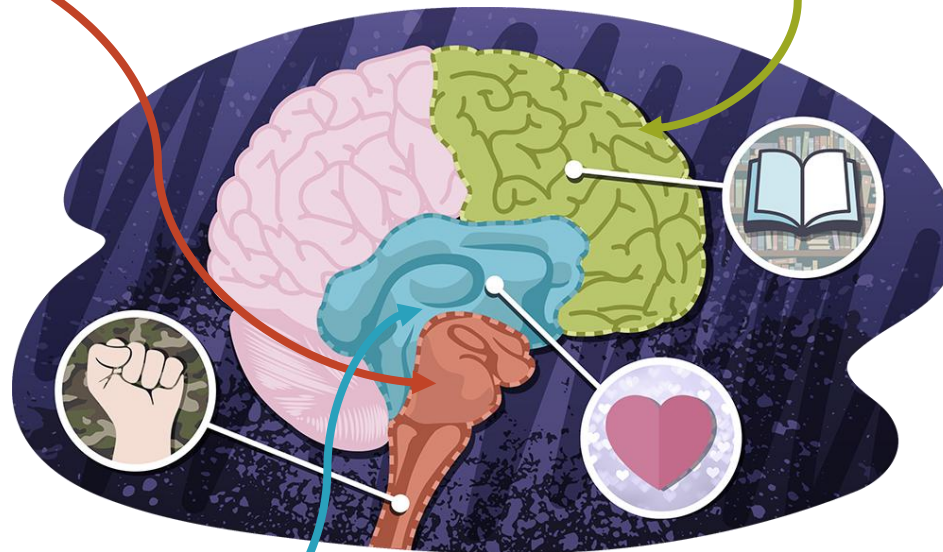
This part of your brain is responsible for regulating your emotions.

- Houses the Hippocampus and Amygdala
- Flight or fight response
- Pleasure and reward

Cerebral Cortex/The Smart Brain/Thinking brain/Rational brain

Responsible for higher functioning and deep thinking. Houses the pre-frontal cortex it controls stuff like:

- Reading, Writing, Talking & Listening
- Critical thinking, Problem Solving
- Social-relations
- Concentration
- Organisation & Decision Making
- Reasoning & Judgement
- Creativity
- Emotional regulation



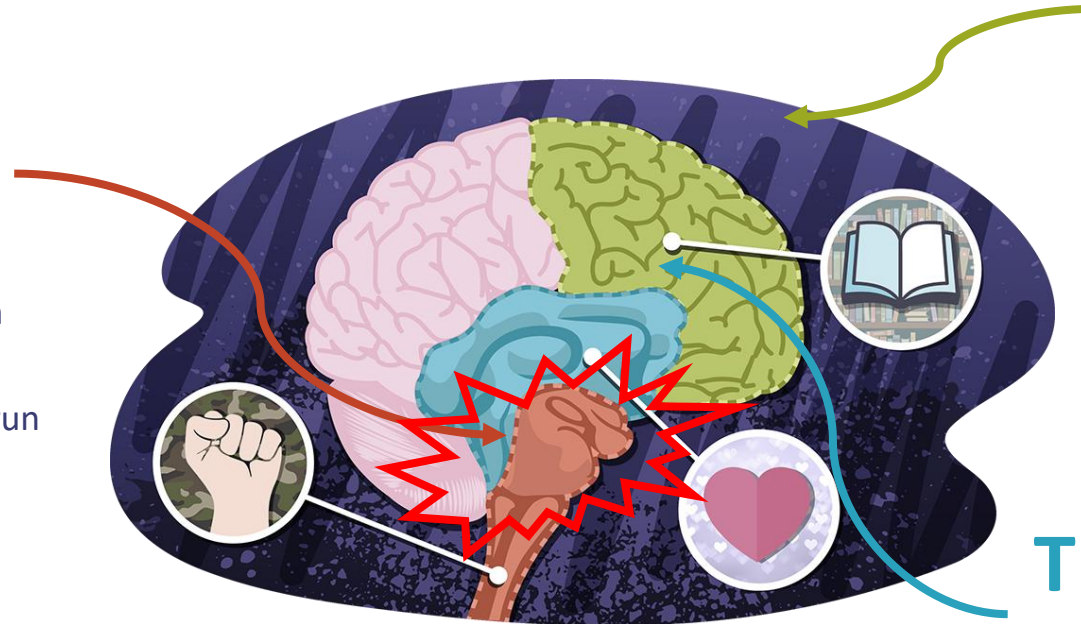
When Anxiety Strikes...

The Brain Stem

Prioritises survival functions:

Increased heart rate so you can breathe more oxygen

Extra energy goes to limbs (to run faster)



Thinking Brain

The energy that your smart brain would normally use is sent to other prioritised brain and body systems.

Temporarily goes 'offline' – it doesn't matter if you can speak French verbs or do algebra if you are in danger!

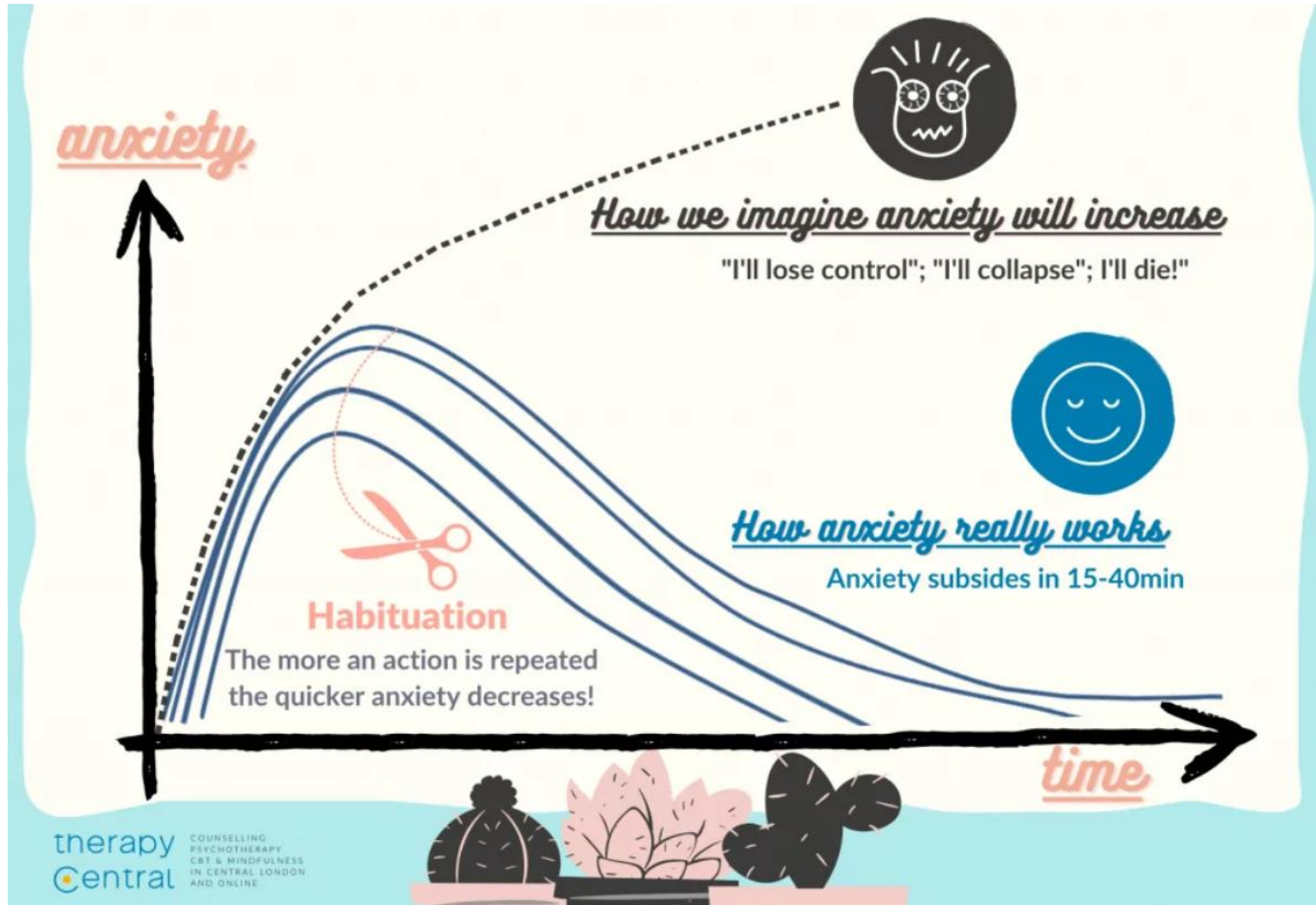
All rational thinking has gone

The Limbic system

Emotions become more intense. Like a WARNING SYSTEM to help us respond to threats quickly.

Triggering fight or flight response

Overcoming anxiety by facing fears...



We can make anxiety 'disappear' quickly in the short term but this makes it worse in the long run.

How we **respond** to our experience of anxiety is key in learning to manage it.

MAINTENANCE FACTORS

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

**LEARNING / SOCIAL
ENVIRONMENT**

BIOLOGY / GENES

NEURODEVELOPMENT

LIFE EVENTS

**COPING
EXPERIENCES**

ANXIETY

THINGS MY CHILD MIGHT DO

Anxious thoughts / beliefs:

- overestimate danger
- underestimate ability to cope

Misinterpret / fear physical symptoms of anxiety:

"something bad is happening"
"I don't like this feeling"
"I can't cope with this feeling"

Anxious Behaviour:

- avoid the things we fear
- seek reassurance
- safety behaviours

THINGS OTHERS MIGHT DO

Model fearful behaviours:

- panicking around spiders
- avoidance of situations

Get frustrated or anxious when the child is anxious:

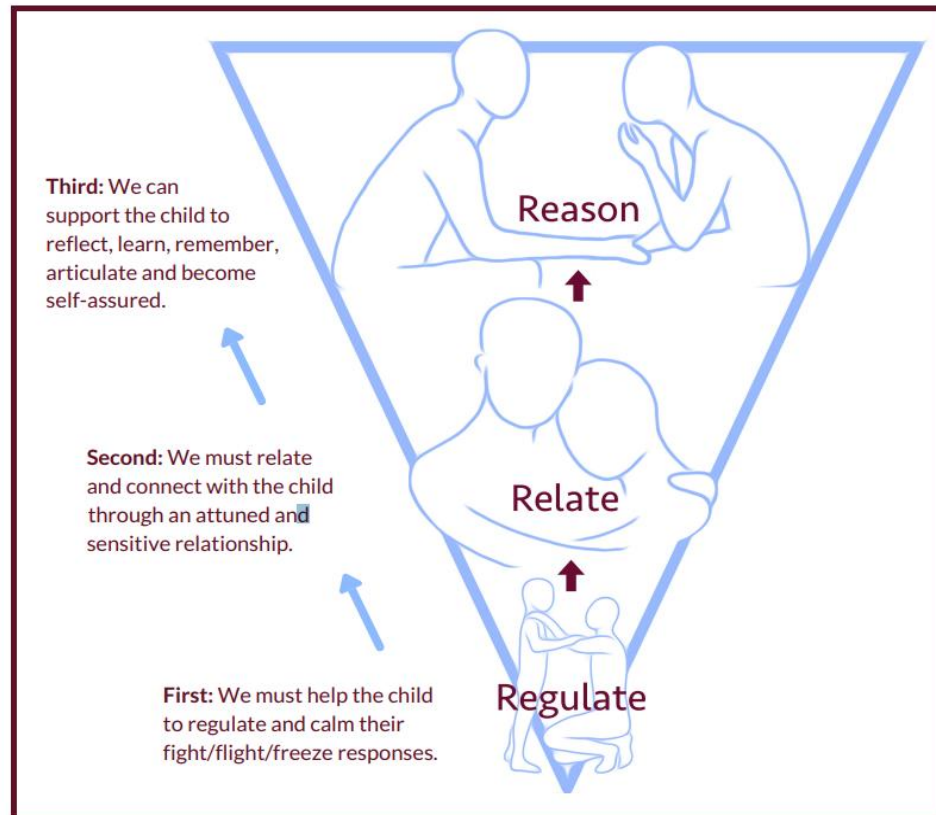
- observing unfamiliar reactions
- validating / Invalidating of child's experience

Protective / Reassuring:

- can reinforce anxiety
- prevent child from developing own coping skills / risk management



Bottom-up approach



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

Bristol Child Parent Support. Co.Uk

Positive Parenting and Sleep Solutions

**WHEN YOUR CHILD IS DYSPREGULATED,
THEY CANT THINK OR BEHAVE
APPROPRIATELY**

**SUPPORT YOUR CHILD TO CALM &
REGULATE WITH THE 3 R'S (DR BRUCE
PERRY)**



1. Regulate



Hold your child, use a soothing voice to help them feel safe, calm and loved

2. Relate



Validate your child's feelings with the right tone of voice. I know you are really angry right now

3. Reason



When your child has calmed (this can take up to 2 hours. Sit down and discuss "who was that then" how can we help them and you may still need to follow through with a limit.

Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to relate to you (feel connected & comfortable). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

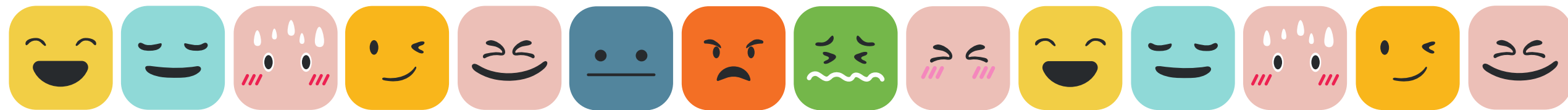
anger

anxiety

regulate ourselves first

frustration

dysregulation

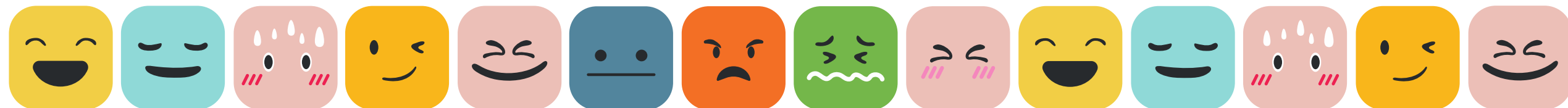


Normalising and acknowledging emotions and



Validating Feelings, and naming emotions

Validation is simply the act of letting someone else know his or her experience is real.



Talking Strategies

Curious questioning

Encourage your child to explore their feelings

WIN Strategy

I wonder...

I imagine...

I notice...



Always remain curious

What might my child be thinking?

Have I missed anything?

Is there another way to think about this?





I noticed

Instead of 'why did you do that'?! It could sound like 'I'm wondering why you did that'

I imagine

I wonder

Could it be

Being Curious

That sounds really hard

It sounds like you might really be struggling with

I'm wondering what you are/were feeling or thinking at that time



Re-framing how we manage/talk to our child

Noticing

Has your child's behaviour changed?

Curious questioning

I notice....

I wonder

What is about situation that is worrying/scaring you

Empathy

Allow yourself to be vulnerable and feel how they might be feeling.

I imagine you're feeling.....

That sounds

• Normalising

- It's understandable that you feel
- Sometimes I feel... when I find something hard or new

• Challenge

- Let's problem solve this
- I know this is scary etc... and I need you to be brave

• Praise

- I'm so proud you gave that a go
- You were very brave

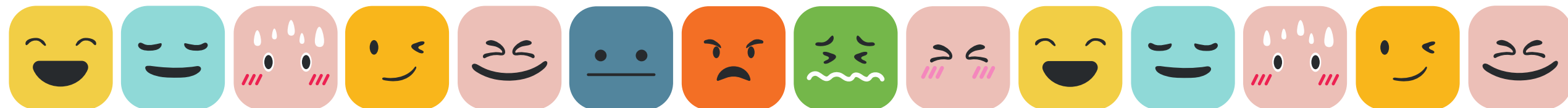


Language

Unhelpful Response	Spoken or implicit message	Attuned Response	Spoken or implicit message
Disapproving	Don't cry ("your feelings are making me uncomfortable"). Non-verbal message "Feelings are not expressed in this family – stop having the feelings that you are feeling". Don't be "you".	Accepting	Child cries. "I can see that you're hurting. It's okay to feel uncomfortable feelings". "I'm here if you want to talk about it; I'm here for you". Is there anything else that may help?
Dismissing	"You'll get over it (smiling at distressed child). Come on now, try to cheer up – you're making me sad just looking at you". Message: "Don't have feelings or express them – find an emotion that's easier for me (happy).	Empathic	<u>So</u> you're feeling <u>pretty unhappy</u> right now. Sounds like so much pain and hurt about XXXX?
Defensive	Don't blame me; don't be cross with me now. How can you feel like this after all I do for you? (Guilt inducing)	Open	I understand how angry you may feel with me. Maybe you're feeling let down by me? So perhaps you're seeing me as someone who just doesn't understand/care what you're going through? Perhaps you think I don't see how important this is for you? Is that right?
Deflecting (<u>changing</u> the subject)	Unspoken message: "I can't handle what you're feeling right now, so I'm going to try to get you to focus on something else."	Acknowledging	I'm finding this <u>difficult, but</u> let me see if I've understood what you're saying – You're furious and upset that <u>Dad</u> and I are splitting up. You hate me for us not staying together – have I got that right?

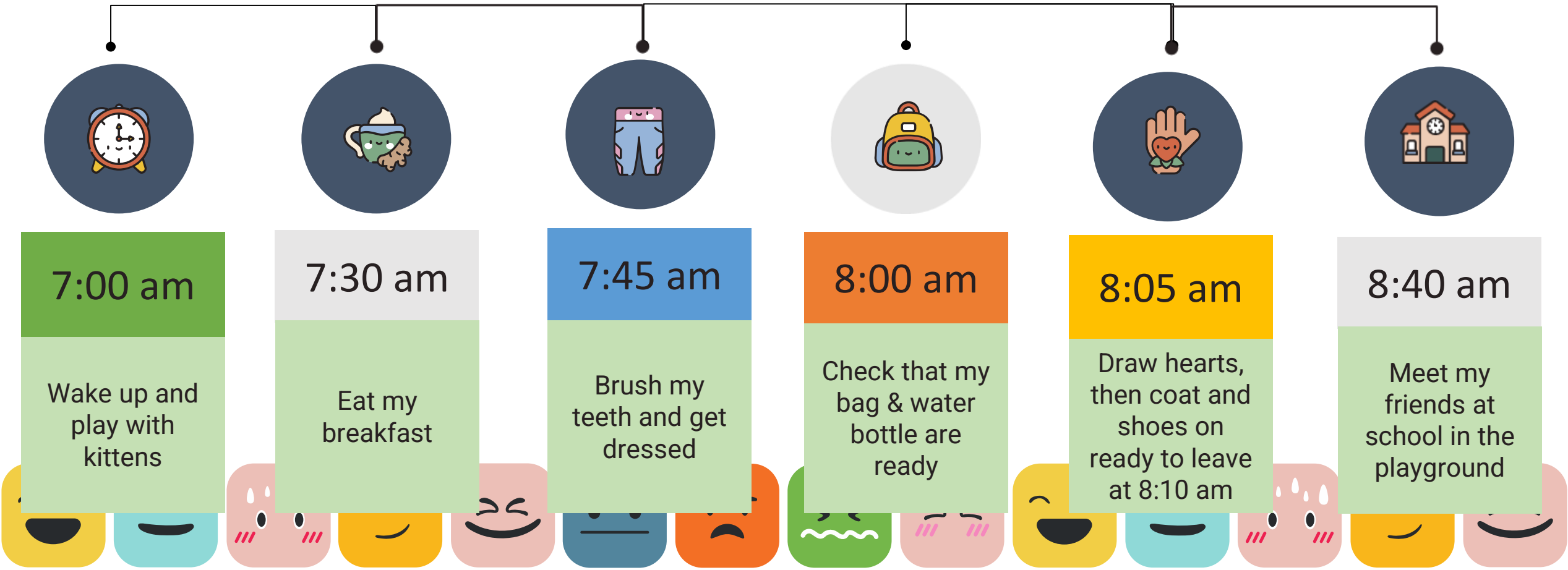
Routines for children:

- Children thrive on routines.
- Most of us follow routines in our daily lives.
- They help us to make sense of the day, to keep anxieties at bay, to create good habits and stop habits that are bad for our health and wellbeing.
- The same applies to children of all ages. Routines are much more powerful than just being the daily tasks that help you organize your day.
- Mealtimes, shopping, getting ready for bed - all create relationships and repetition to help children develop self-confidence, curiosity, social skills, self-control, communication skills, and more.
- There is so much that is new in your child's world every day that making things predictable is comforting for them.
- Knowing what to expect reassures your child and this gives them confidence to carry out tasks independently



Morning Routine

Sometimes mornings won't go to plan, and that's okay.
Use all your strategies and tell yourself "I've done this before and I can do it again!"



Calming and Grounding Techniques through Mindfulness for Children (age 4-11)

We spoke with Play Therapist Emma Brummell who shares some calming and grounding techniques for children aged 4-11.



Breathing Activities

The breath can be an extremely soothing and calming tool. Deep belly breaths can activate our parasympathetic nervous system and induce feelings of calm. We can help children to breathe in this way using props such as:

Lying down and placing a teddy or loved toy on their tummy.
Asking if they can help their teddy fall asleep by rocking them slowly up and down using their tummies. Breathing in a big breath, right into their belly to make the teddy rise up and slowing blowing the air out again to make the teddy lower down. Do a few of these then check if the teddy has become calm and fallen asleep.

Starfish breathing:
Use your child's hand (or help them cut out and decorate their own starfish) to help them take deep, calming breaths. Use your finger or direct them to use their own to trace up their thumb, breathing in as they do so, then breathing out as they follow their thumb down the other side. Repeat for each finger.

Hot chocolate breath:
cup your hands together like you are holding a mug of hot chocolate. Guide your child to, "Breathe in and smell the hot chocolate, breathe out, cool it down."

We can explain to our children how deep breaths can help us feel calm when we are worried, upset or angry. We can also model the effectiveness of this to our children by showing them how we use deep breaths to help us when we are feeling these emotions too.

Calming Jar

Fill a clean and empty jar or see through container with:

- A range of coloured glitter/sequins/stars
- Water
- A couple of drops of food colouring (optional)

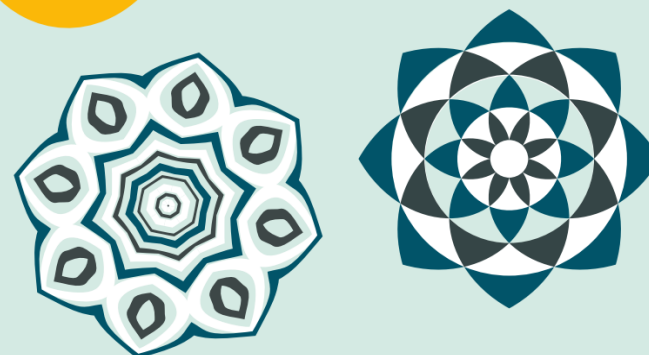
Shake the jar and allow your children to watch as the glitter swirls and circles around the jar.

We can use the jar as a tool to help teach children to use their breath to calm their minds, use one of the breathing activities below, practice it along with your child while the glitter swirls in the jar. When you have completed the breathing, notice the now calm glitter.

You might like to talk to your child about how we can help our thoughts to slow down and become calm by watching the glitter slow down as we breathe.

Mandalas

Drawing or colouring a mandala can be very soothing and help to regulate emotions from feelings of anxiety or worry to a state of calmness. You can print some mandalas to colour or draw a circle and allow your child to create their own mandalas.



Grounding exercise

This activity is helpful when your child is in an over stimulated state or when they are experiencing anxiety, worry, upset. Ask your child to name:

5 things they can see

4 things they can hear

3 things they can feel

2 things they can smell

1 thing they can taste

This can help to bring your child to regulate their heightened feelings and bring them into the here and now.

Movement

Movement is a very effective tool in helping the body to use the extra adrenaline created by stress and filling it with endorphins that help us feel happy and energised.

Dancing is a great activity for helping to move into a more positive mood. Gentle stretches and yoga moves can also help to calm the mind and the body. [Cosmic Kids](#) yoga YouTube channel has a wide range of excellent yoga classes for children.

Get Outside

When emotions are running high, simply changing the environment and moving from inside to outside can have a powerful and often immediate effect on ours and our children's mood. Take a walk in nature or simply stand on your doorstep and listen carefully, what can you hear? Can you feel the wind/rain/sun on your face? What can you see when you look around?

Gratitude

Cultivating gratitude is a fantastic way to help children and adults alike to focus on the small things in their lives that bring joy. We can do this by sharing with your child 3 things that made you happy today. Ask them to do the same. This helps to shift the mind into a more positive mindset, helping them to feel calmer and happier.

Sign Posting

[Mindworks Website](#)

[Surrey online parent support courses](#)

Resources for Parents

Cruse Bereavement care

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Mind Matters Surrey IAPT

(Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) is a talking therapy service for adults (18+) registered with a GP in Surrey. They provide quick and easy access to talking therapies, <https://www.mindmattersnhs.co.uk/>

Samaritan helpline

Whatever you're going through, samaritans will face it with you. Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call 116 123 for free <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

Call for free on 0808 802 5544 from Monday – Friday 9:30am – 4pm

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mindworks-surrey.org

