

Stress and anxiety and practical ways to support your child

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Aims of today

- to acquire a shared understanding of stress and anxiety and the signs of these
- to discuss helpful and unhelpful strategies for you and your child
- to share how we can have conversations about stress and anxiety

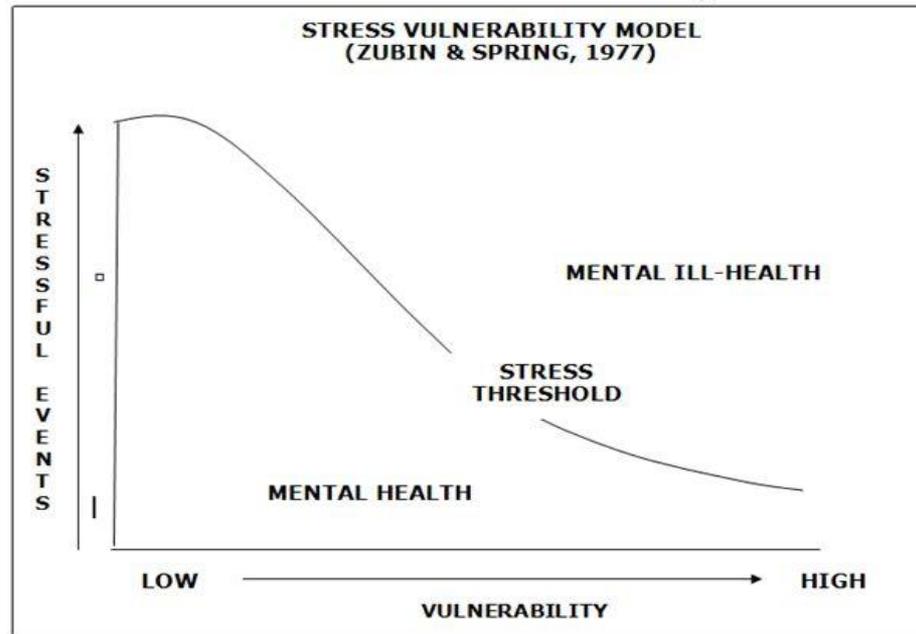
What is stress?

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure, and pressure turns into stress when you feel unable to cope.

A bit of stress is normal and can help push you to do something new or difficult, but too much stress can take its toll.

Stress Vulnerability Model

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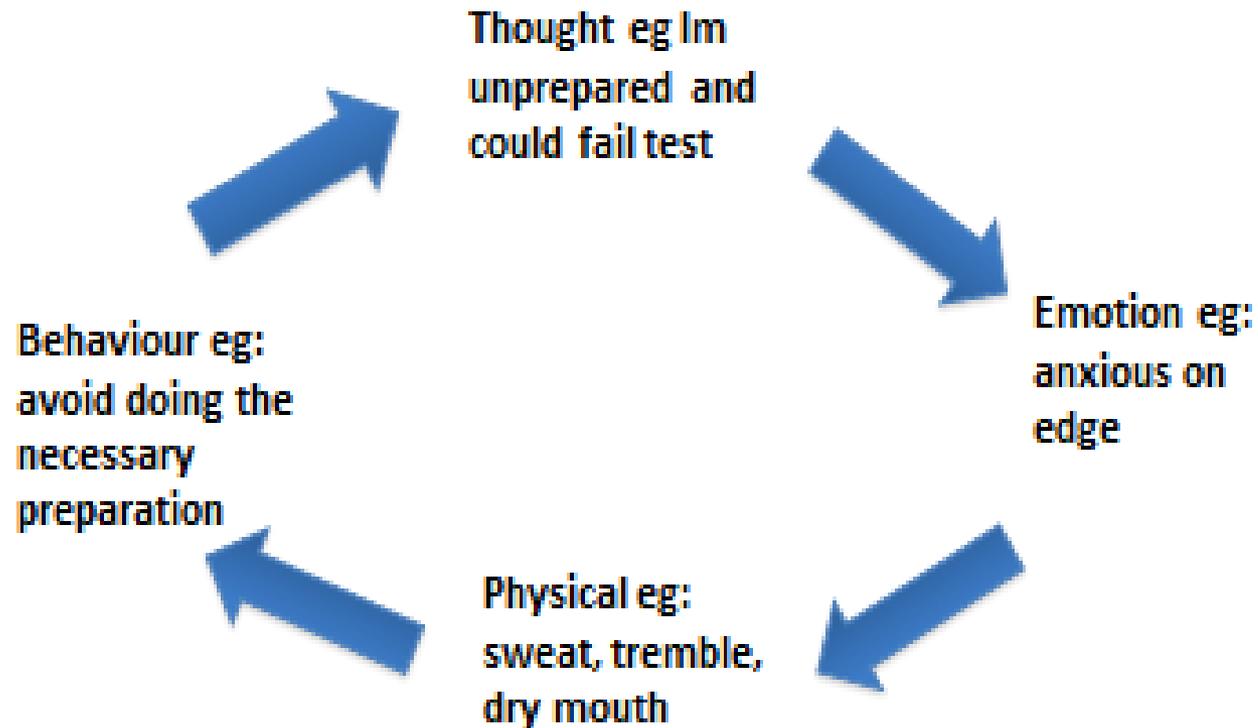


Zubin, J. and Spring, B. (1977) Vulnerability. A New View on Schizophrenia. Journal of Abnormal Psychology 86, 103-126. APA. Reprinted with permission

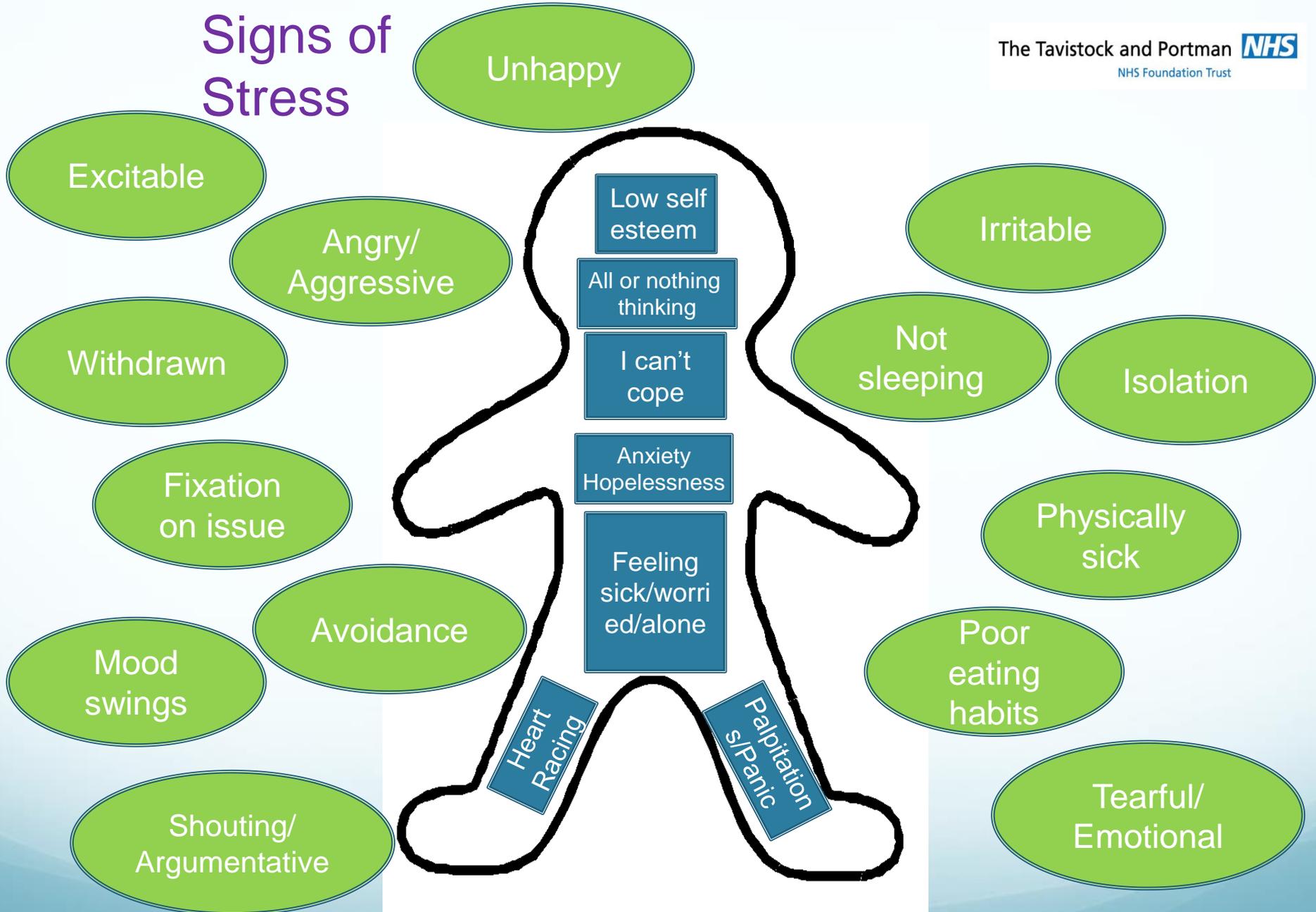
What is anxiety?

- **Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.**
- Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life – for example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam, going to see the doctor or when meeting new people. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal.
- However, some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and can often affect their daily lives.

Anxiety Cycle



Signs of Stress



Other early signs

- Wets or soils themselves
- Often falls out with friends
- Is distracted or absent
- Has poor attendance
- Exhibits sudden changes in behaviour
- Is often judgemental about themselves (self-critical)

Psychological symptoms of anxiety

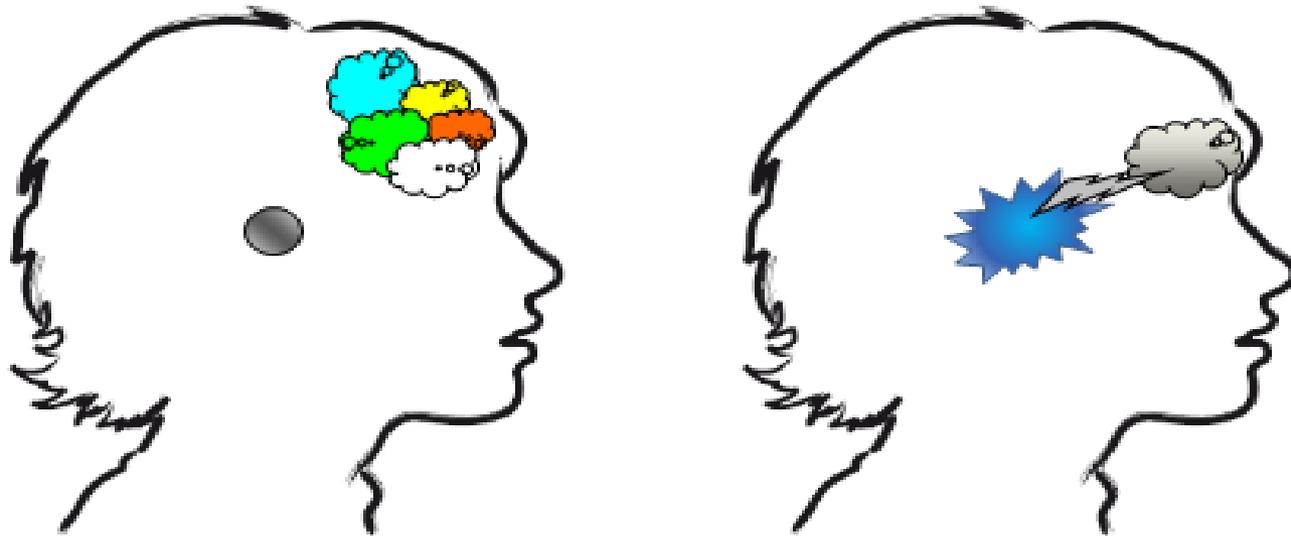
- Feeling worried or uneasy a lot of the time
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Being irritable
- Being extra alert (hyper-vigilant)
- Feeling on edge, not being able to relax
- Needing frequent reassurance
- Feeling tearful

Physical symptoms of anxiety

- Pounding heartbeat
- Breathing faster
- Palpitations
- Feeling sick
- Chest pains
- Headaches
- Sweating
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling faint
- Needing the toilet more frequently
- “Butterflies” in your stomach

Understanding our brain

The Thinking Brain and the 999 Brain



Thinking Brain



In the frontal part of our brain, thoughts and positive feeling for other people are created. This part of the brain holds helpful resources (problem solving skills/planning/other experiences)

Alarm Brain



Alarm Brain

This part of the brain monitors dangerous and uncomfortable feelings/situations

The brain and resilience

- The brain can be trained to become more resilient
- We can teach our thinking brain to control our alarm brain
- By encountering and coping with challenges, the thinking brain can tell the alarm brain 'It wasn't so bad after all'



Calming our Alarm Brain

- Talk to someone you trust
- Count to 10
- Have a loud internal conversation: Repeat a word or a phrase that is calming to you.
- Remind yourself of a time when you have solved a similar problem
- Make physical distance from the situation

Calming our Alarm Brain

- Sit down
- Exercise
- Get some fresh air
- Deep and steady breathing
- Challenge anxious thoughts

Helpful Strategies



- Eat well
- Be active, walk, exercise regularly
- Get enough good sleep
- Spend time with friends and family
- Keep learning
- Take notice, be mindful
- Give – small everyday acts of kindness, or bigger things e.g volunteering
- Gaining some control over the problem
- Prepare and plan
- Do something relaxing – find what works for you and your child
- Keep practicing calm breathing techniques - remember stress response, slowing down physical effects on the body can help
- Seeking help
- Keep practicing challenging anxious thoughts

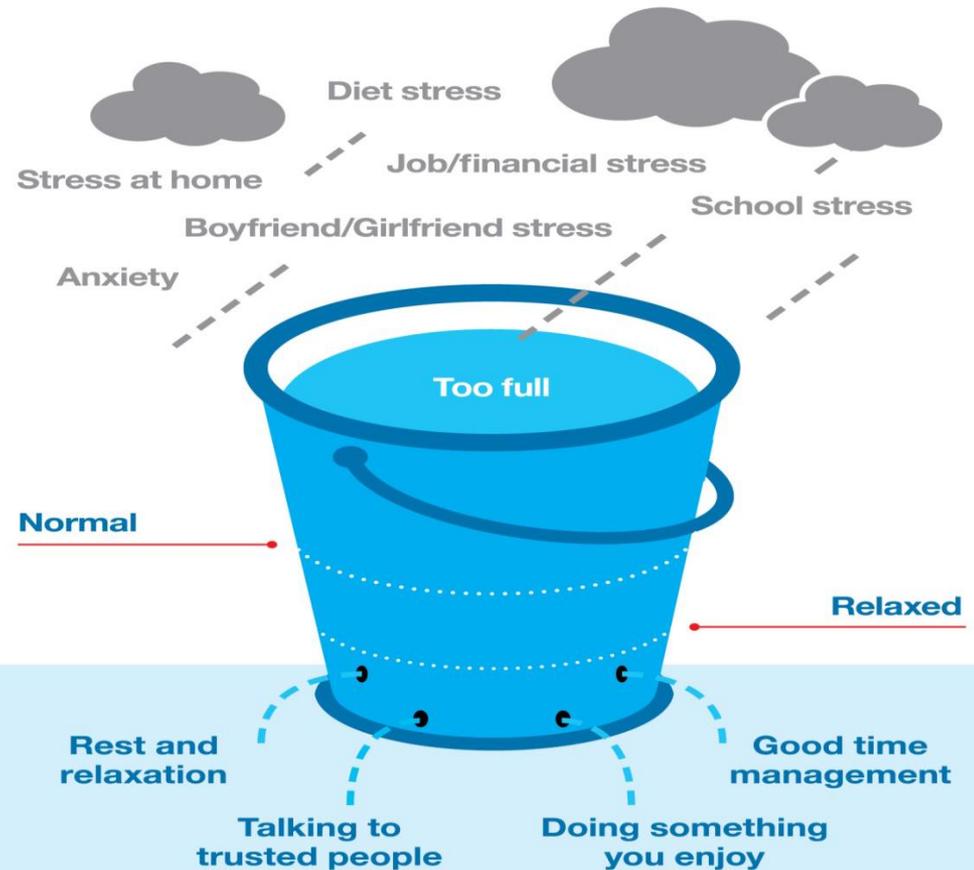
Unhelpful Strategies

- Avoiding the situation / problem
- Keeping it to yourself
- Isolating yourself
- Distraction (can be helpful short term, but long-term promotes avoidance)
- Being self-critical
- Having a poor diet/very little or no exercise.
- Stop looking after yourself



What can affect our mental health?

Our ability to deal with life's stresses is known as our 'resilience'. Sometimes we face more difficult experiences than usual and this can affect how we think and feel. Take a look at the diagram below to see why its really important that we look after ourselves, and some suggestions for how we can do this.



It's good to talk

- Choose your time and place
- Let them know that you are concerned and why
- Give examples of what you've noticed
- Actively listen
- Be curious, seek to understand their experience
- Don't judge
- Ask your child what they think would help
- Don't rush to solutions

Resilience – the key components

1. Being able to cope with the challenges that life presents
2. Feeling good enough
3. Bounce Backability
4. Having good relationships both with self and others
5. Being on track/Having the ability to focus

The link between resilience and mental health

- Building up our resilience can help us to enjoy life, and to survive overwhelming feelings, stressful events, pain and disappointment.
- Resilience protects and strengthens our mental health

Nine things all children need

1. Structure
2. Consequences
3. Parent-child connections
4. Lots and lots of strong relationships
5. A powerful identity
6. A sense of control
7. A sense of belonging/culture/spirituality/life purpose
8. Rights and responsibilities
9. Safety and support

(Dr. Michael Ungar,
Resilience Research Centre)

Online Resources

- Young Minds
<https://youngminds.org.uk/>
- The Mental Health Foundation
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>
- NHS Choices – Young People and Mental Health
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/youth-mental-health/Pages/Youth-mental-health-help.aspx>
- Rethink Mental Illness – Mental Health Info for Young People
<https://www.rethink.org/living-with-mental-illness/young-people>
- Healthy Families – information regarding supporting young people
<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/>