


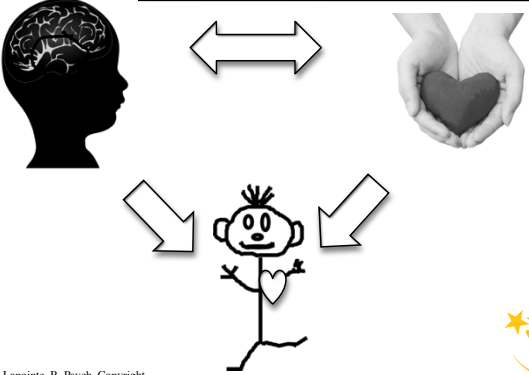
**Worries and Wonders:
Supporting Children
Struggling with Anxiety**

The Wishing Star
Lapointe Developmental Clinic


Dr. Vanessa Lapointe
Registered Psychologist
Wishing Star Founder
Author – Discipline without Damage



Science and Heart




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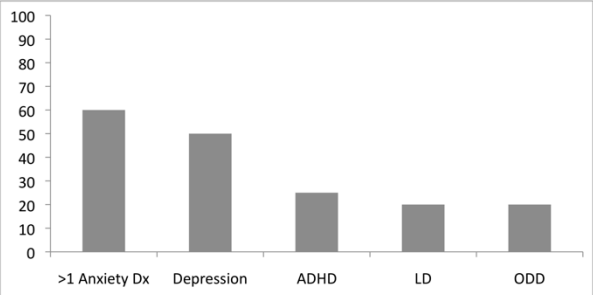
Anxiety

- Anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed mental health disorders (for children & adults)
- 6.4%
 - 42 000 children in BC
 - 338 000 children in Canada
- Between 12 and 20% of us will be “clinically diagnosable” at some point in our lifetime

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The Murky World of Anxiety



Condition	Prevalence (%)
>1 Anxiety Dx	60
Depression	50
ADHD	25
LD	20
ODD	20

From: CBT Connections 2005/06 Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents: Recognition, Therapeutic Assessment and Evidence-Based Treatment
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The experience of anxiety


Behind the label



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Common Threads


- Fear
- Trauma (in the eye of the beholder)
- Agitated
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Acting out
- Sleep disturbances – nightmares; can't settle; difficult to rouse in morning
- Increased body stress response – cortisol – can kick off all sorts of other body symptoms
- Safety & security questioned
- Disregulated
- Feel blamed – viewed as "won't" vs. "can't"
- Organization difficulties
- Self-esteem impacted
- Relationships affected
- Attentional regulation is impaired



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Anxiety as "Alarm"

The root of the emotion




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Redefining Anxiety

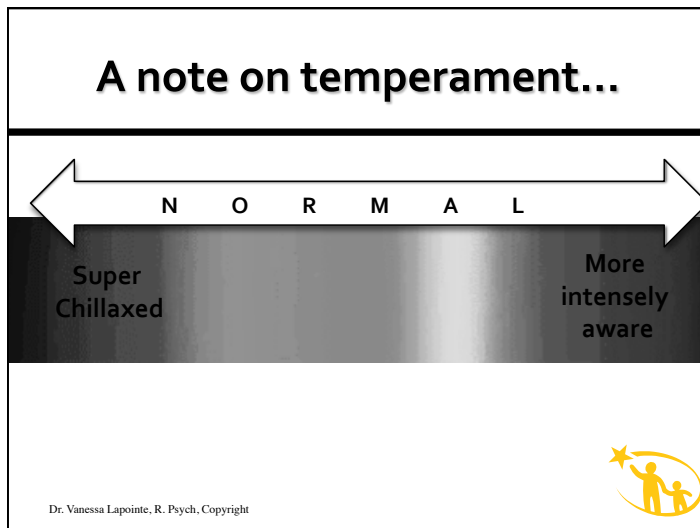
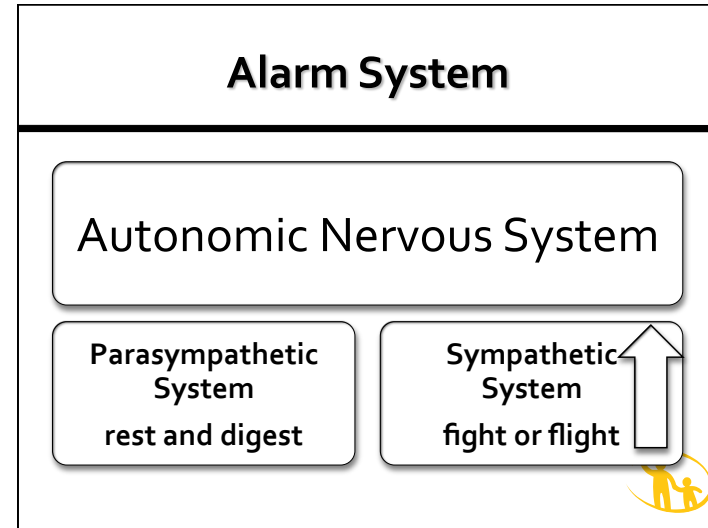
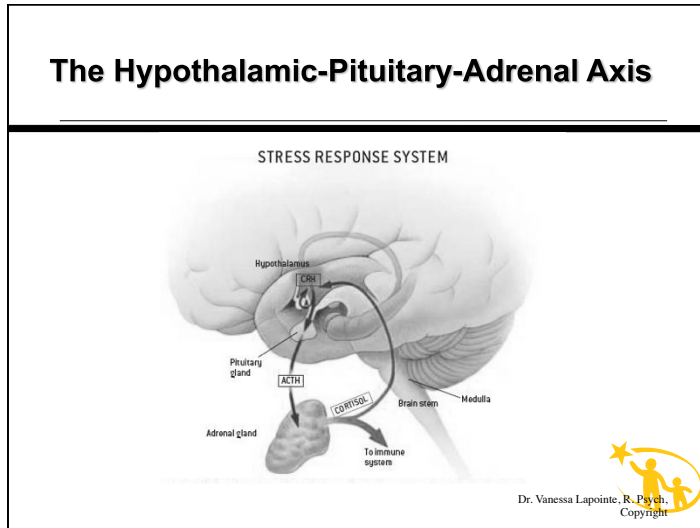
Anxiety = Alarm

Dr. Gordon Neufeld

- A healthy, normal and much needed response in the body
- An adaptive response
- Our belief systems drive the continued alarm response
- Becomes maladaptive when no obvious threat is present
- To change this, we need to go to the emotional core

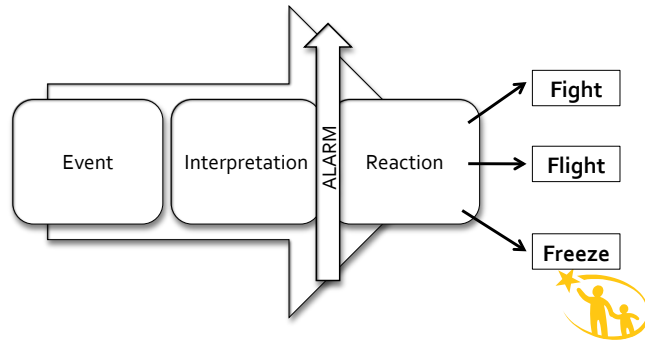


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- ### Shyness ≠ Anxious
- Shyness has an ill-informed bad rap!
 - We do NOT want children to do the bidding of a stranger
 - Shyness is a developmentally appropriate reaction of a child to a person not part of their inner circle
 - Shyness keeps children emotionally (and otherwise!) safe
 - We want children to be shy around people they don't really know
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The adaptive function of alarm



Anxiety in the beginning

- Anxiety has at its roots in a child who is struggling for control, typically when there is the experience of things around them feeling out of control
- This struggle kicks in neurologically and chemically as a stress response
- This stress response leads to distortions in thinking that make sense for the child in light of the feelings they are experiencing

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The Role of the "Big People"

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The role of the "big people"

- Children view their "big people" as their ultimate protectors
- Without us, they are not able to survive in this world
- The developmental span of childhood for our children is birth to mid-twenties
- Their connection to us is vital to their development
 - Physically
 - Emotionally
- This connection is so important it has been given the name "attachment" in the research world

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The role of the “big people”

- Attachment is biological, evolutionary, neurological, and emotional in nature
- As **children** we are born to attach – the developmental process constantly drives at this
- As **adults**, we are primed to facilitate the attaching of our children – it is part of our wiring
- You are either in the club, or you are not
- You have to be in the club to have “context” from which to operate



The role of the “big people”

- Attachment is the relationship “super glue” that holds a child close to a parent/key caregiver/big person – physically and/or emotionally
- Children are meant to **seek** it
- Adults are meant to **PROVIDE** it



The role of the “big people”

- Purpose of attachment is to keep the child safe AND make the child feel safe/secure
- Hierarchy is an essential component of attachment
- Attachment is as important to healthy development as eating or sleeping
- When attachment is compromised, children are affected on a physiological level



Tronick’s Still Face



Sources of alarm

1. DISCONNECT

- emotionally and/or physically

2. THREAT from the world around

- “perceived” or actual

Reinterpreted
as...

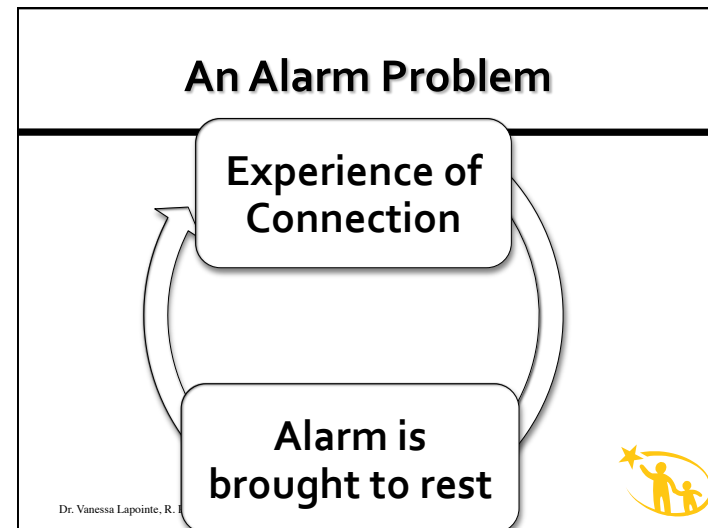
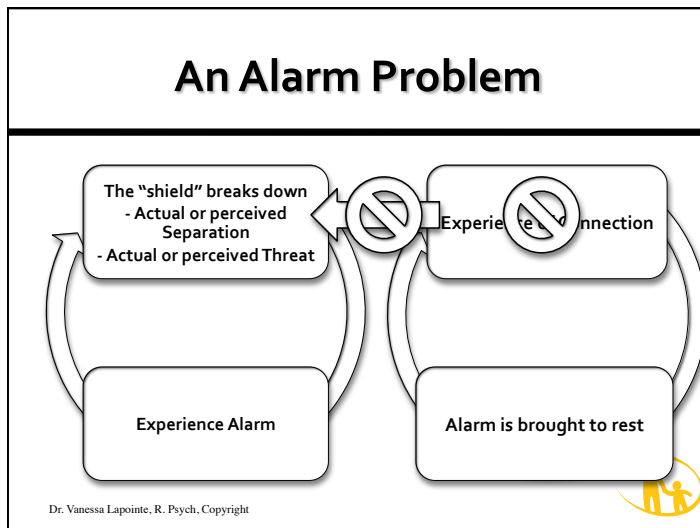
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Some Possible Sources of Alarm

- Physical disconnect from big person for any reason
- Emotional disconnect from big person
- Major life events – positive or negative
- Death – understanding of, experience of, perception of
- Transplantation – foster, adopt, divorce, blended families
- Not “accepted”
- Shame
- Secrets

- Expectations experienced as too intense
- Sensitive temperament
- Discipline – disconnection based
- Trauma
- Development
- Change
- A child who senses their big people are not in charge
- A child who has to look too much to peers for support
- Threats to physical integrity

List adapted from Dr. Gordon Neufeld
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Often misinterpreted fall-out...


- Angry
- Irritable
- Short-fuse
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Quick to tears
- Overwhelmed
- Fearful
- On-edge
- "fearless"
- Lacking in insight
- Restless
- Over or under focused
- Agitated
- Overly focused on outcomes
- Hyper-attuned – not filtering incoming and/or outgoing



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Support for the Child Struggling with Anxiety

Finding a way through




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Bad Big People \neq Anxious child
necessarily

BUT...

"At rest" child $=$ Attuned & Insightful Big People




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Guiding Principles

What children *need*

1. Connection security results in maturity
2. Big people need to ensure that little cups are overflowing
3. Big people must always be the answer to a little person's troubles – even if you have no idea what that answer is, the child must believe that you are the answer. Period.
 - "Children need us to be bigger, stronger, wiser AND kind" – Circle of Security
 - "Hulk it up"
4. Bottom line always comes down to connection



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Debunking anxiety pop-culture

1. We do not get better at dealing with worry by practicing dealing with worry – this simply leads to a build-up of worry.
2. Long-term consistency= real change; quick fix = fake change.
3. The process is never unidirectional – life happens!



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The process of creating SAFETY

1. Provide Shelter

- Make the world be quiet

2. Fears to tears

- Get it out!

3. Cultivate courage



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1. Provide Shelter



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Provide Shelter from the Storm



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Provide Shelter from the Storm

1. Provide the umbrella – reduce sources of anxiety
2. Provide a sense of protection from sources of anxiety
3. Get in front of anxiety – be omnipotent
4. Routine, consistency, calm
5. Nest
6. No matter what – an enduring theme
7. Do not test the connection

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2. Fears to Tears

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Fears to Tears

- Emotion needs to move through in order for it to be processed
- To move from fears to tears, a child needs:
 1. Safety in expression
 2. Safety in acceptance
- It is the job of the big person to cultivate that safety
- Relationship is the vehicle by which safety is ensured

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Fears to Tears

1. Be the one they turn to – the one they know will be soft
2. Communicate the sense that you can handle the expression of the fear – no matter what
3. Absolutely ensure that the child feels heard
 - Actions speak louder than words
4. Find ways to provide relief from physical symptoms – in connection and not isolation
5. Move the non-verbal to the verbal – get them talking – move to safety and resolution using the narrative
6. Get them moving – physical activity provides a naturally sourced boost

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3. Cultivate Courage

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Cultivate Courage

- Six-year-old client:
 - "Courage is feeling afraid but doing it anyway"
- You have to actually be able to feel afraid to be courageous
- When the stage has been set with relationship, and fears can now easily be converted to tears, courage can be cultivated
- For courage to be expressed, fear must be endured
- The child will need experiences of fear to find courage!

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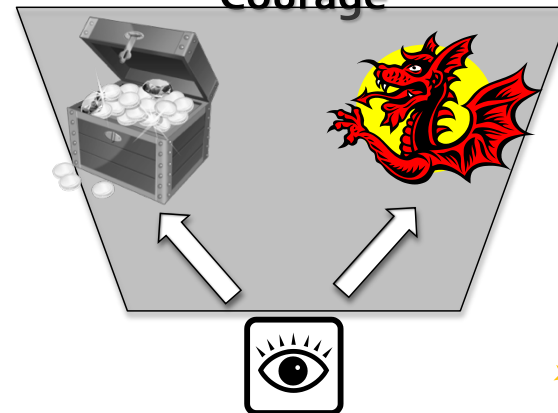
Cultivate Courage

1. Allow fear to be confronted
2. Start low and go slow
3. Provide repeated experiences
4. Provide a soft landing when courage is fleeting or outcomes are disappointing
5. Focus on BOTH the desired outcome and the lurking fear
6. Provide a safe haven for retreating to

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Courage



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Summary



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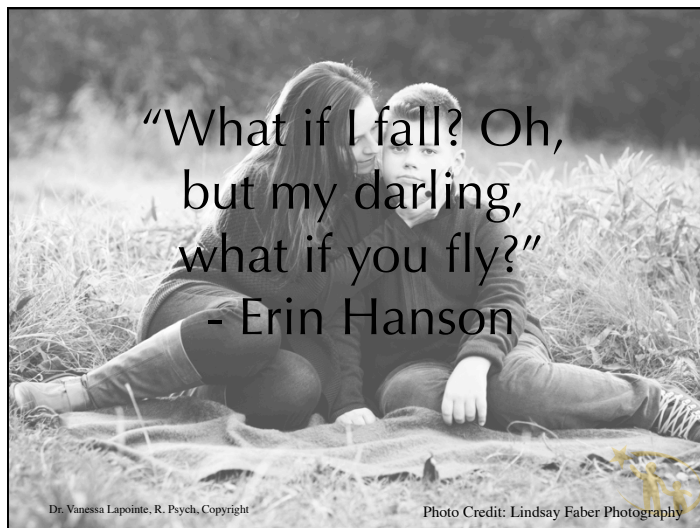
In Summary...

- Anxiety is often masked by aggression and anger
- Do not be fooled by the changing faces of anxiety
- A soft, nurturing response is always the answer
- Relationship is at the heart of creating the right conditions for allowing a child to change their fears to tears, and find their courage.




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“What if I fall? Oh,
but my darling,
what if you fly?”
- Erin Hanson



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The Wishing Star
Lapointe Developmental Clinic





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