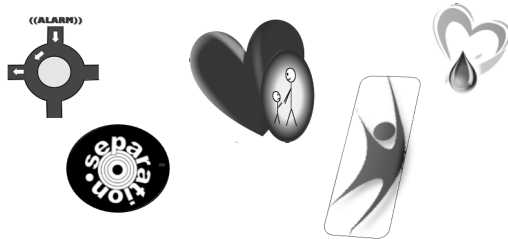


## Alarm and Anxiety – How to help our children



Eva de Gosztonyi, Neufeld Institute - Valérie Fortin, FNEC - Sarah Cleary, FNEC

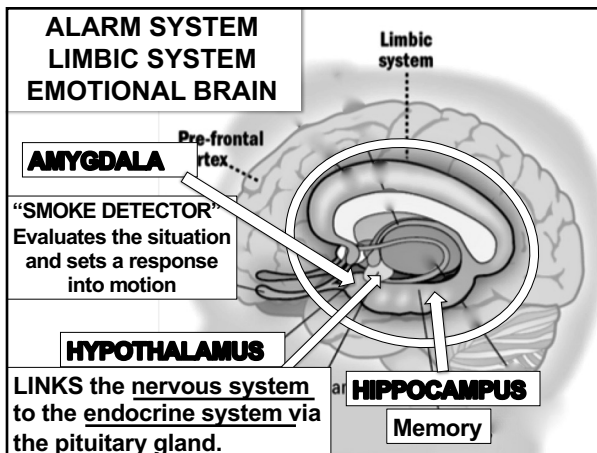
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## What is anxiety?

... a vague sense of unsafety and unease, characterized by apprehension and restlessness

... the subjective experience of an **ACTIVATED ALARM SYSTEM**

2



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## WHAT IS THE ALARM SYSTEM?

- is mediated by the **LIMBIC SYSTEM** with the **AMYGDALA** registering the threat and the **HYPOTHALAMUS** orchestrating the response
- the autonomic nervous system is involved through the **SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**

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## SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM the system of ACTIVATION

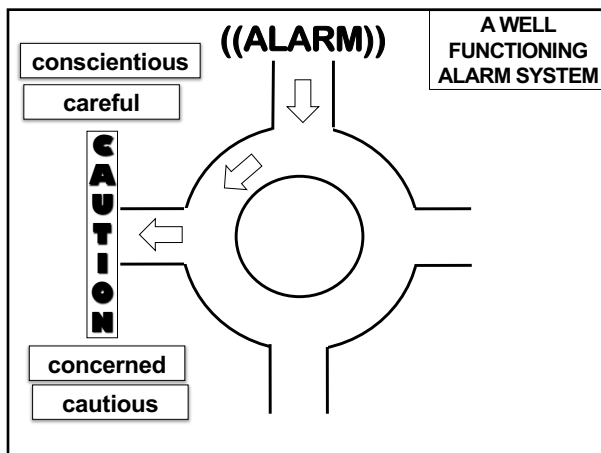
- **Cortisol** – increase blood sugar – suppress immune system
- **Adrenaline** – increases heart and respiratory rate
- **Norepinephrine** – responsible for vigilant concentration
- **Growth Hormone** – increases glucose
- Constricts blood vessels
- Sharp Increase in Breathing & Heart Rate
- Blood diverts to Muscles
- Suspends "rest & digest"

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## WHAT IS THE ALARM SYSTEM?

- is mediated by the **LIMBIC SYSTEM** with the **AMYGDALA** registering the threat and the **HYPOTHALAMUS** orchestrating the response
- the autonomic nervous system is involved through the **SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**
- the **AROUSAL** and **ATTENTION** systems are highly involved
- with **ALARM GIVEN HIGH PRIORITY**

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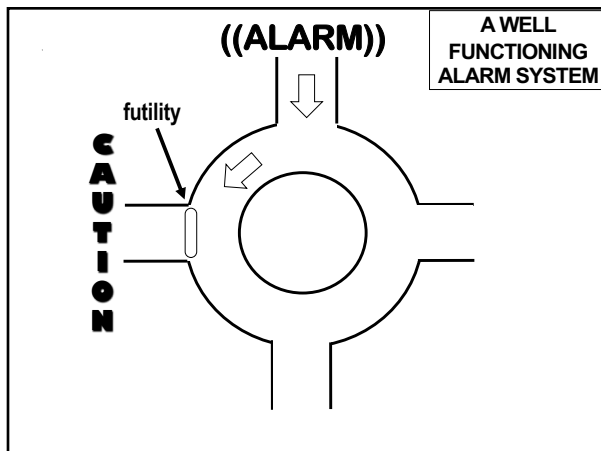


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### Some ways we alarm children

- by raising our voice
- with warnings & threats (especially of separation)
- by giving ultimatums
- by feigning separation
- by trading on a child's fears
- with scary stories

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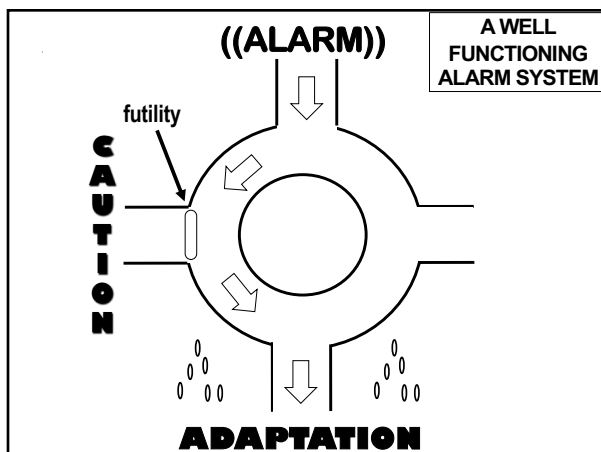


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### SOME ALARMING FUTILITIES

- not being able to hold on or keep close
- the loss of affection or significance to another
- not being wanted, chosen or preferred
- not being truly seen or understood
- not being able to be good enough
- the passing of time
- the loss or death of those attached to

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### ADAPTATION

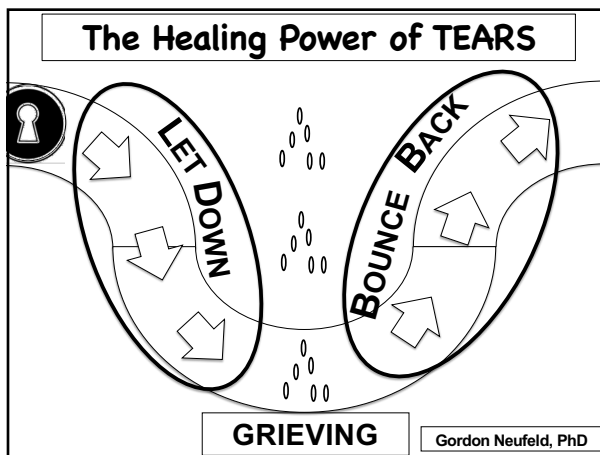
The EMOTIONAL PROCESS whereby we are changed by that which we cannot change

#### TRANSFORMATION

The journey of adaptation is a journey of **SADNESS** and **TEARS**



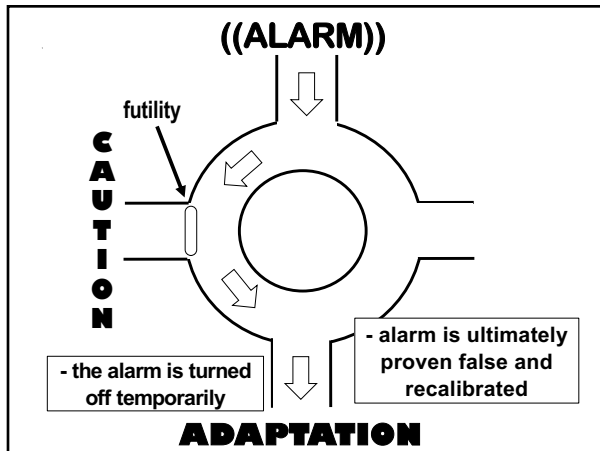
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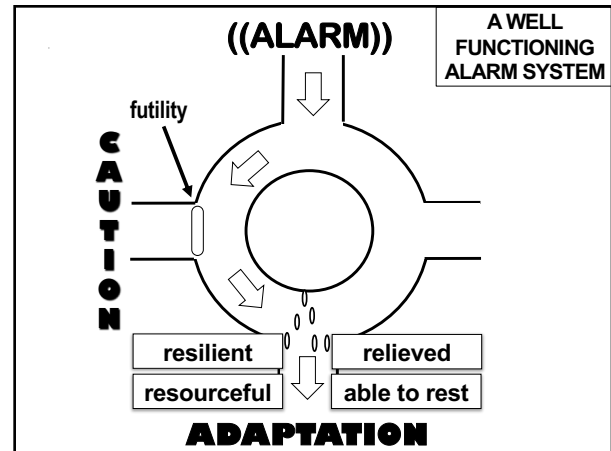
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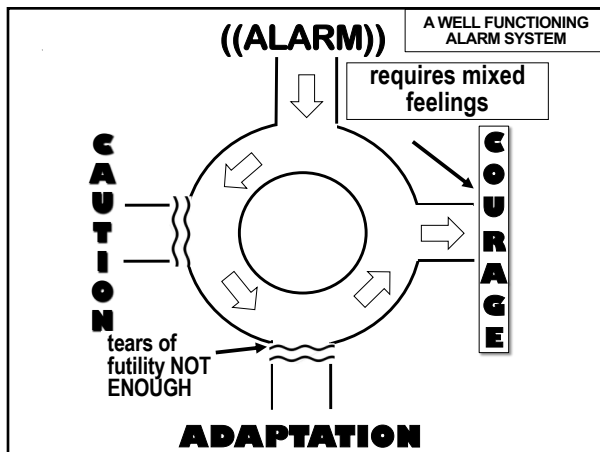
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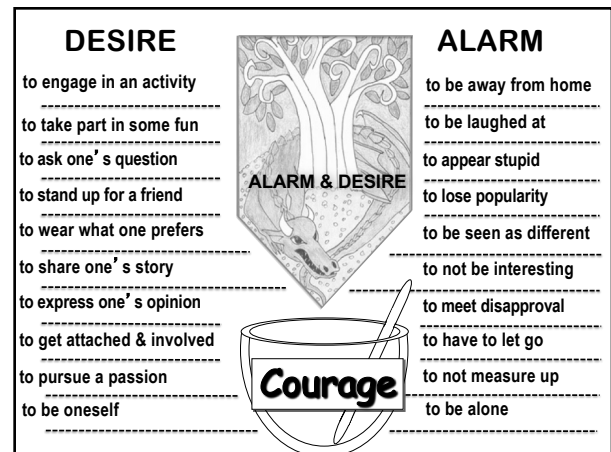
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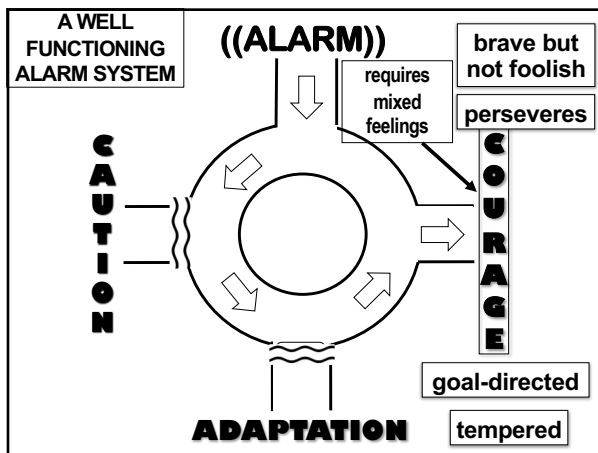
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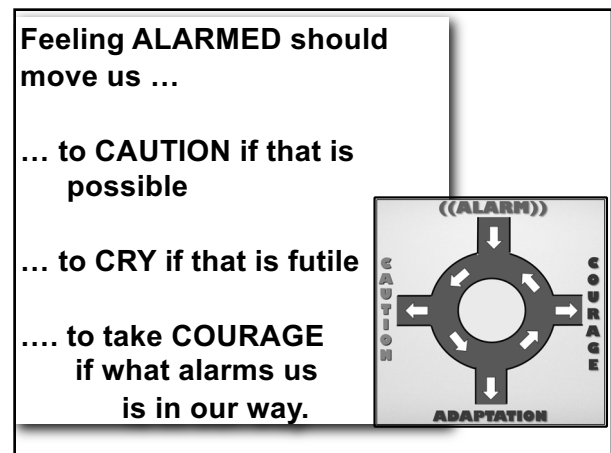
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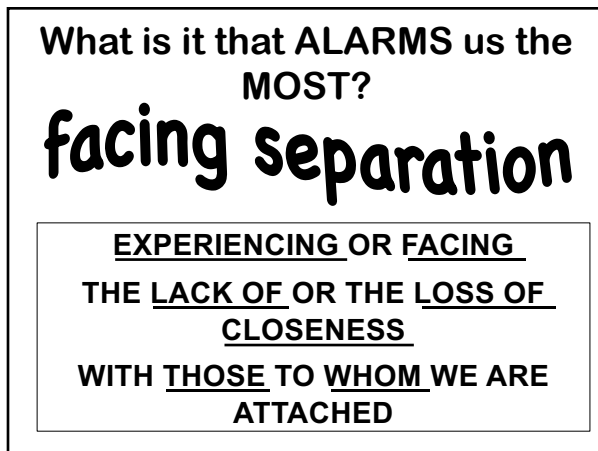
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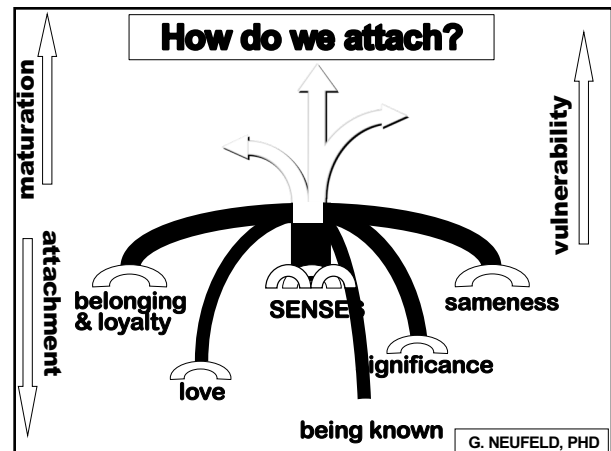
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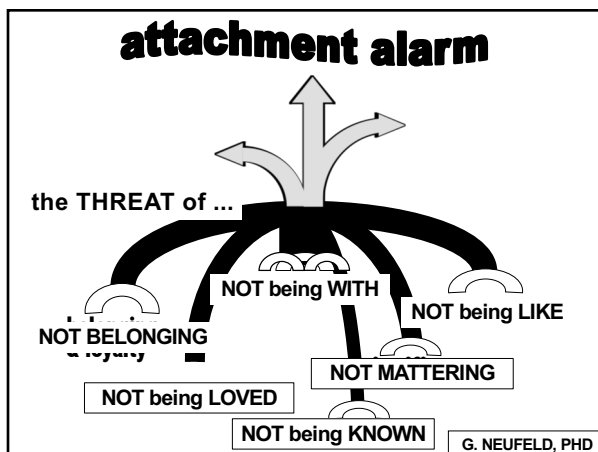
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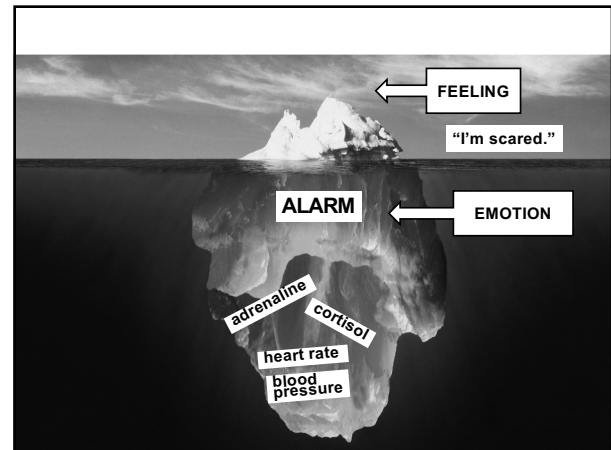
## What is ANXIETY?

When we can't connect our **ALARM** to the separation we are facing.

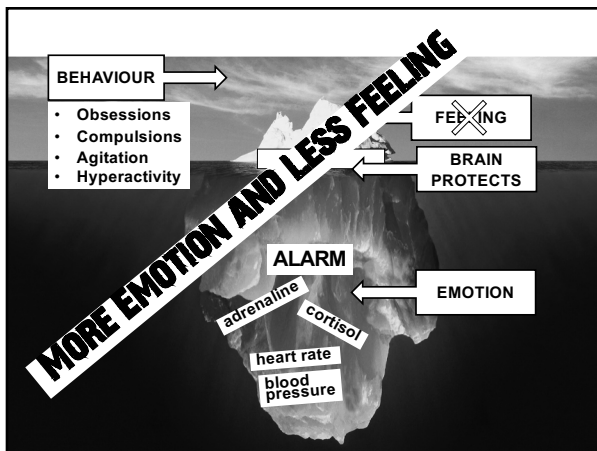
... 'alarm without eyes'

Our brains protect us from seeing that which would make us feel  
**TOO VULNERABLE**  
or  
**TOO WOUNDED.**

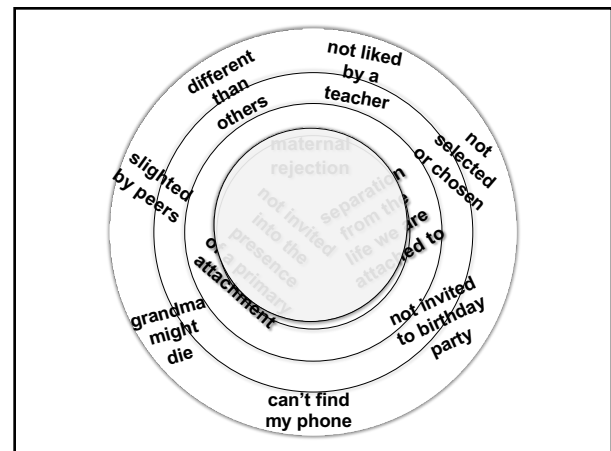
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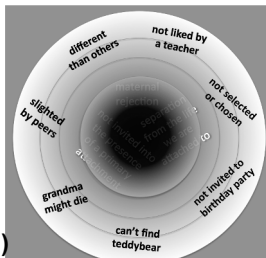
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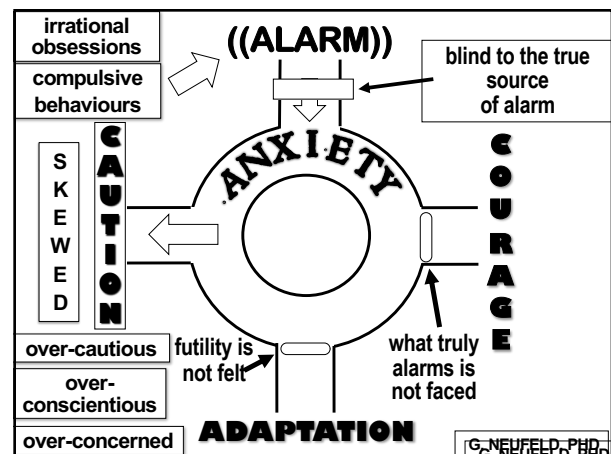
We become blinded by the experiences that affect us the most.

- the alarm is divorced from its cause
- displaces the alarm to what CAN be seen
- gives rise to alarming **OBSESSIONS** irrational reasons for alarm (cognitive backfill)



*"Children are not alarmed because there are monsters under the bed. There are monsters under the bed because children are alarmed."*

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### ELEVATED ALARM

When children can't talk about being "scared" the ALARM "energy" gets channeled into other "behaviours"

- anxiety
- obsessions (specific fears)
- compulsions (need to do certain things)
- nightmares
- restlessness
- hyperactivity

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### compulsive anxiety-reducing behaviours

- oral activities such as thumb-sucking, chewing, nail biting and eating
- rhythmic activity and stimulation - rocking, pacing, music with a beat, swinging, flickering fire, watching waves, worry beads, stroking, twirling hair, rubbing genitals
- seeking comfort through contact with transitional objects
- physical exertion
- drug taking (e.g. nicotine, alcohol, marijuana and most prescription drugs)

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### DEALING WITH ALARM and ANXIETY

- ACCEPT ALARM AND ANXIETY
- PROVIDE A SENSE OF REST AND SAFETY
- PROVIDE OUTLETS THAT HELP REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF ALARM
- USE THE POWER OF PLAY
- HELP THE 'TEARS' TO FLOW IN THE FACE OF ALARMING FUTILITIES
- CULTIVATE COURAGE

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### ACCEPT ANXIETY

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>DON'T MAKE</b> | <b>ANXIETY AN ALARMING EXPERIENCE</b>          |
| <b>NORMALIZE</b>  | <b>AND DEPERSONALIZE THE EXPERIENCE</b>        |
| <b>ANTICIPATE</b> | <b>AND <u>MAKE ROOM</u> FOR THE EXPERIENCE</b> |

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### ACCEPT ANXIETY

**DON'T BATTLE** SYMPTOMS OR IRRATIONALITY

- IF THE CHILD STARTS DOING A COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR OR OBSESSING – RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS A SIGN THAT THE BRAIN IS OVERLOADED WITH ALARM
- INSTEAD OF TRYING TO STOP THE BEHAVIOUR – COME ALONGSIDE AND ACKNOWLEDGE:
  - "YOU'RE GETTING WORRIED."
  - "I'M HERE."
- PROVIDE COMFORT – NOT ADVICE

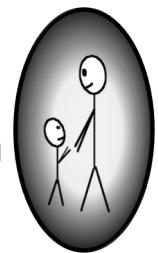
*"Mom, all your motivational chatting is really stressing me out!"*

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### PROVIDE A SENSE OF REST AND SAFETY

**When the world feels unsafe what do our children need?**

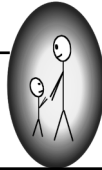
- THEY NEED TO KNOW THAT WE WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM AND GET THROUGH THIS DIFFICULT TIME
  - Information doesn't make a child feel secure – relationships do.
  - Safety is about human attachment and we can provide this.



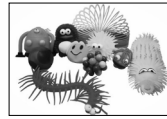
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**PROVIDE A SENSE OF REST AND SAFETY**

1. PUT THE EMPHASIS ON TOGETHERNESS AND RELATIONSHIP
2. BRIDGE ALL SEPARATIONS – BE THE ONE TO RESTORE THE RELATIONSHIP
3. ASSURE THAT ADULTS WILL CONTINUE TO BE THERE TO CARE FOR
4. REASSURE THAT WE WILL FIND A WAY THROUGH EVEN IF IT IS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE HAD IN MIND



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**PROVIDE OUTLETS FOR REDUCING ANXIETY****FIDGET ITEMS****WEIGHTED ITEMS****Heavy blankets****CALMING AREAS****LOTS OF OUTDOOR PLAY and EXERCISE**

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**PROVIDE OUTLETS FOR REDUCING ANXIETY**

**Grooving and jamming together!**  
(Emotional Expression through movement)



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**ENCOURAGE EMOTION-BASED PLAY**

Play is like a release valve – the emotion can move through.

**ALARM at play**

- ❖ playing with monsters
- ❖ being the monster
- ❖ scary stories (one step removed)
- ❖ pretending to be scared
- ❖ playing “disaster”
- ❖ playing hospital/being sick
- ❖ playing isolation



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**ENCOURAGE EMOTION-BASED PLAY**

Play is a place to process their internal world

**FACING SEPARATION in play**

- ❖ playing dead
- ❖ playing the orphan
- ❖ hide and seek games
- ❖ playing tag and chasing games
- ❖ fairy tales where children are lost or face separation



*“It is through play that children get to imagine how they will survive in the face of adversity.” Hannah Beach*

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**HELP THE TEARS TO FLOW**

1. Start by talking about and reflecting back the Emotion
  - i. Alarm: “That was scary.” “You weren’t sure what was going to happen”.
2. MATCH THE EMOTION.
3. THEN: Move subtly towards SADNESS by allowing a tinge of sadness in your voice.

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### HELP THE TEARS TO FLOW

4. When the child starts to cry:
  - i. **DON'T ASK WHY**
  - ii. **DON'T MINIMIZE** (the reason is always valid)
  - iii. Hold the child in their tears.
5. Don't try to reassure too quickly. **HOLD** in the **SADNESS**.
6. Don't do too much talking or problem-solving at this time

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### HELP THE TEARS TO FLOW

#### AN OLDER CHILD / ADULTS

1. SAD BOOKS, MOVIES, YOUTUBE
2. MELANCHOLY MUSIC
3. IN A DARK ROOM – IN A DARK CAR
4. **SHOULDER TO SHOULDER** (walk – working together)
5. **SLIGHT TINGE OF SADNESS IN VOICE**
6. **NORMALIZE SADNESS AND TEARS**

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### CULTIVATE COURAGE

For courage to develop, a person needs to be able to **FEEL** both **ANTICIPATION** and **APPREHENSION**, as well as to be capable of feeling both emotions at the **SAME TIME**.

#### STEP 1 – Fan the **DESIRES** that would answer the alarm

- instead of discounting or negating the alarm

#### STEP 2 – Draw out feelings of alarm & desire separately

- come along-side both feelings but one at a time

#### STEP 3 - GET ALARM AND DESIRE TO MIX

- lead by example to a place of 'on the other hand'
- start with feelings that are less intense
- find the right distance where the feelings can mix

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### HOW TO REASSURE YOUR Students

- **COMMUNICATE OFTEN**
- **LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU AND THE OTHER STAFF WILL BE THERE WHEN SCHOOL OPENS**
- **RECOGNIZE THE EMOTION: ALARM**
- **STAY WITH THE EMOTION BEFORE OFFERING SOLUTIONS**
- **WELCOME TEARS**
- **CONTINUE TO REASSURE**
- **ACCEPT LIMITATIONS**



*IT IS ABOUT PRESENTING OURSELVES AS **BEING** THE ANSWER*

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### Alarm and Anxiety - How to help children

**UNDERSTAND ALARM**

**HELP FIND SADNESS AND TEARS**

**STAY IN THE CARING ALPHA ROLE**

**USE THE POWER OF PLAY**

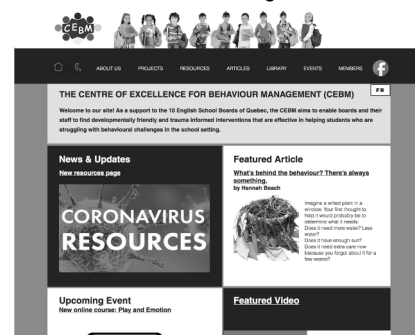
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Eva de Gosztanyi, Martine Demers, Catherine Korah  
Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management

[www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)

A website that helps schools to use Neufeld's Developmental Approach.



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