

'Challenging Behaviour' & Mental Health

The behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg



Our Aims

- Increase our understanding of the link between behaviour and mental health.
 - What is challenging behaviour?
 - Why does it happen?
 - Stages of behaviour and anxiety
 - Tools for your toolbox

What is 'challenging behaviour'?

Formal Definition:

“Culturally abnormal behaviour(s) of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities.” Emerson 1995

What does challenging behaviour mean to you?

Behaviour is Communication

- It's the behaviour that is challenging to us, its not the child that is challenging.
- The child is not trying to be challenging but their behaviour serves a function i.e. communication, attention, emotional regulation, perceived survival.
- Children with mental health needs often struggle to regulate anxiety-provoking feelings:
 - They don't know why they are feeling this way
 - They do not have the words to explain how they are feeling
 - They do not have the skills yet to manage these feelings
 - The feelings can trigger past memories/experiences

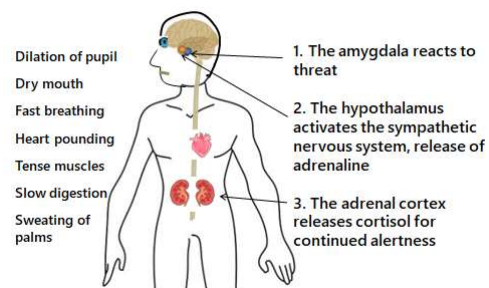
Stress & Anxiety

- **Stress** = a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. It is our body's response to a threat in a situation when we feel at risk. It is involuntarily.
- It causes a **'fight, flight or freeze' response**.
- **Anxiety** = persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. The perception of the stressor happening again.
- **Anxiety** is a reaction to the stress.
- Anxiety develops from the individuals interpretation of an event, not the event itself.
- Our brain has the same response to a perceived/imagined event as to a real stressful event.

Stress & Anxiety

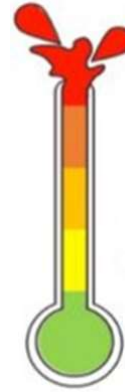
- When our children are anxious about everyday situations they can become stuck in 'fight, flight or freeze' mode and will remain there for long periods = **present as easily triggered.**
- Situations can subconsciously trigger memories from the past causing sudden mood changes without children even realising it.
- It can cause children to be hyper-vigilant, looking for the next threat or recreating scenarios that are predictable.

The fight or flight response



Accumulative Effect of Stress

- Stress is multi-layered; different events/situations can cause different levels of stress. Our **resilience** depends on how we manage this stress.
- **Resilience** = the ability to mentally or emotionally cope with a crisis or to return to a pre-crisis status quickly.



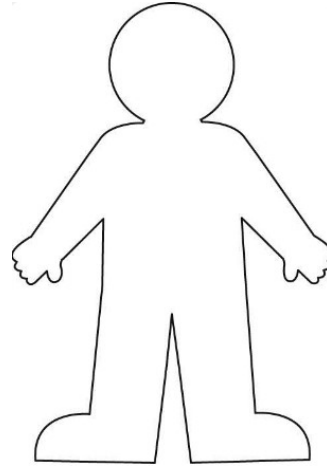
I cannot cope!
 "It's time to do our Lexia"
 Other children are too noisy
 Taxi turned up late
 No toast for breakfast
 Poor night sleep
 Argued with siblings

Is this Anxiety or Behaviour?

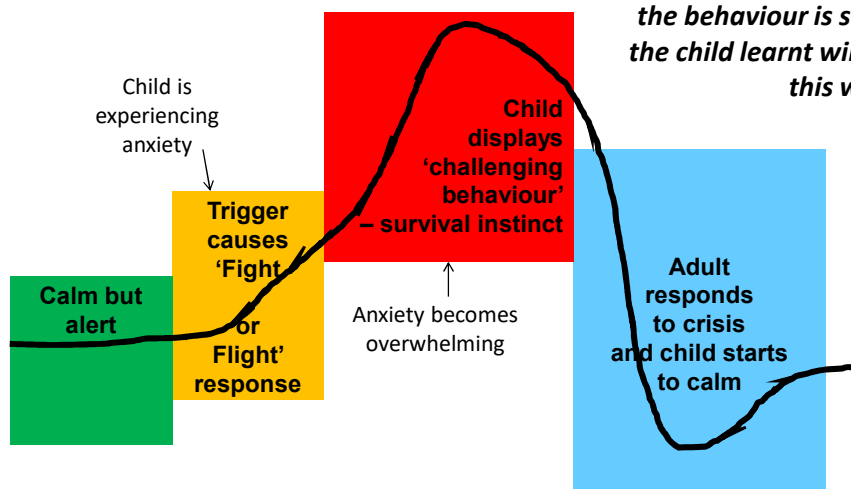
- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Avoidance of activities | • Controlling |
| • 'Attention' seeking | • Shouting/swearing |
| • Aggressive behaviour | • Arguing |
| • Ritualistic behaviour | • Refusing to go out |
| • Withdrawal | • Crying |
| • Self-injurious behaviour | • Sleep difficulties |
| • Regression in self-care skills | • Changes in diet/eating pattern |

Impact on the Body

- Where does your child feel their stress and anxiety?
- What does it look like ?
- Internal or external?
- How would others know?
- Is this different from how you display your anxiety?



Anxiety Curve



'Challenging behaviour' can also be a learnt response but the messaging behind the behaviour is still the same. What has the child learnt will happen if they behave this way? Why?

Green Zone - strategies

- Predictable routine
- Prepare if things are going to be different
- Visuals, sandtimers
- Warnings before something happens i.e. dinner
- Sensory – chew buddy, ear defenders, crunchy food
- Calming sensory strategies (handout)
- Reward system
- Offering some control
- Speak calmly and clearly
- 1 instruction at a time (ASD,ADHD)
- Minimise transitions
- Sleep routine
- Transition object to school
- Calming apps on the phone
- Going for a walk/outdoors

Amber Zone - strategies

- ‘Name’ what you are seeing – *behaviour, possibly trigger, reasons etc*
- Provide solutions where possible
- Reduce verbal demands
- Controlled choice of 2
- Give time to process information
- Sensory/hug
- Calming sensory strategies (handout)
- Set expectations
- Maintain calm voice – directive
- Identify/remove the trigger
- Count up, not down, to 5
- Quiet space
- Calming apps on the phone
- Going for a walk/outdoors
- Distraction

Red Zone - strategies

This zone is primarily about keeping your child and others safe. It is difficult to put in strategies at this stage.

It is helpful to recognise your child's 'red' so you know when they have got to this point in order to change your response.

Some general points:

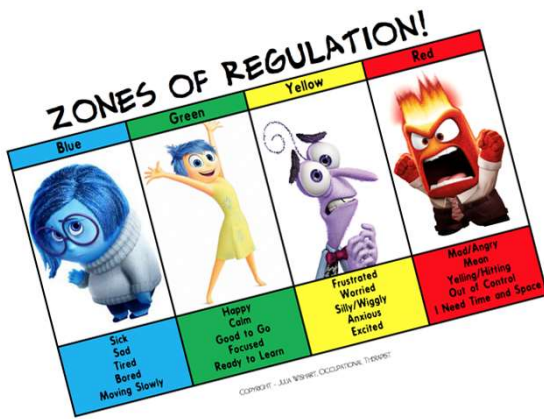
- Reduce all stimulation where possible (incl. verbal dialog)
- Reassure you are there for them and will keep them safe (if helps them)
- Risk assess the possible dangers
- Make the environment safe for everyone, where possible
- Try to stay calm

Blue Zone - strategies

Bare in mind once an incident has stopped your child will not return to green straight away and may need extra support/less demands until completely calmed. Consider:

- What calms/relaxes your child
- Reducing stimulation
- Do not overload your child with information/verbal dialog
- Reassurance
- The behaviour/incident will likely need talking about but this needs to be timed right – for some children this zone might not be where the child can talk about this, for others they may want to.

Zones of Regulation / Incredible 5 Point Scale



How We Can Help

- Know your child's 'life script' and possible triggers.
- Provide predictability with structure, routine and consistent boundaries.
- Prepare children for change.
- Recognise your own triggers and how can impact a situation.
- Recognise your child's early warning signs and respond early.
- Name the emotion – both yours and theirs!
- Name the trigger to show understanding of what is happening and suggest what happens next.
- Use sensory strategies to support emotional regulation.
- See the communication/need behind the behaviour.
- Repair relationships after a behavioural incident.