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Mental Health Strategies for Pediatric Providers Working with Military Children and Youth

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U.S, Naval Hospital Rota, Spain

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Presenter

Scott Cypers, PhD

EDIS Supervisory Psychologist

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U.S. Naval Hospital Rota, Spain

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Scott Cypers, PhD



Scott Cypers, PhD, is the EDIS Department Head and a Child Psychologist at Naval Station Rota. With over 24 years of experience, his career has consistently focused on building innovative programs to address mental health issues, particularly stress, anxiety, and the promotion of help-seeking behaviors. His previous leadership roles include serving as the Director of Anxiety and Stress Programs at the Colorado University Johnson Depression Center and at Children's Hospital Colorado. Dr. Cypers has also provided psychological services to active-duty military personnel at Buckley Mental Health and has held various positions within several university student health services.

Dr. Cypers enjoys all forms of sport and exercise, laughing, as well as spending time with his family and three children who are 18 years old and under.

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Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Describe a comprehensive approach to overall mental health in youth.
2. Develop non-stigmatizing language to discuss mental health issues.
3. Identify essential key skills for addressing various mental health issues.
4. Apply skill development principles for treatment planning, with a specific focus on anxiety.

Why Focus on Mental Health Overall & Anxiety Specifically in Military Connected youth?

- ✓ Data suggest that military connected children may experience anxiety at higher rates compared to the general population, with some studies reporting around 30% of youth show signs of distress, such as anxiety, especially after multiple parent deployments.
- ✓ Military connected youth may experience more concerns and stigma around mental health related issues due to military connection and concerns for family deployability.
- ✓ Military connected youth may move more and be in locations that have less access to mental health or ability create longer term therapeutic connections.
- ✓ Anxiety disorders are manifesting earlier and appear to create a vulnerability to mood-based disorders.
- ✓ Anxiety is associated with significant impairment in social, academic, and familial functioning.

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My Personal Journey



(courtesy of Dr. Cypers)



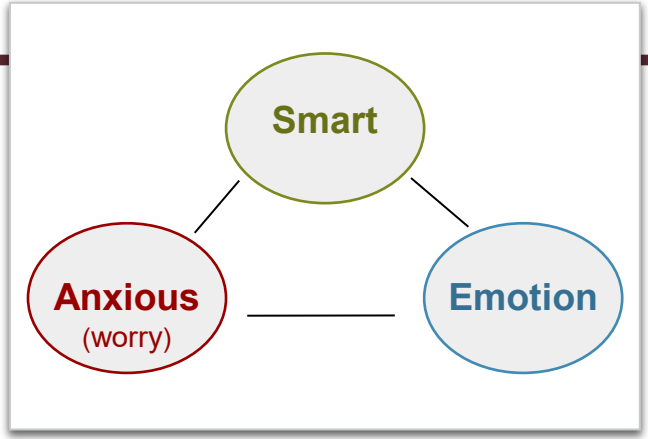
(alamy.com)



(jeffcopublicschools.org)

Primary Program Elements

1. Use a Framed Model
2. Approach Anxiety as a Skill
3. Enhance Motivation





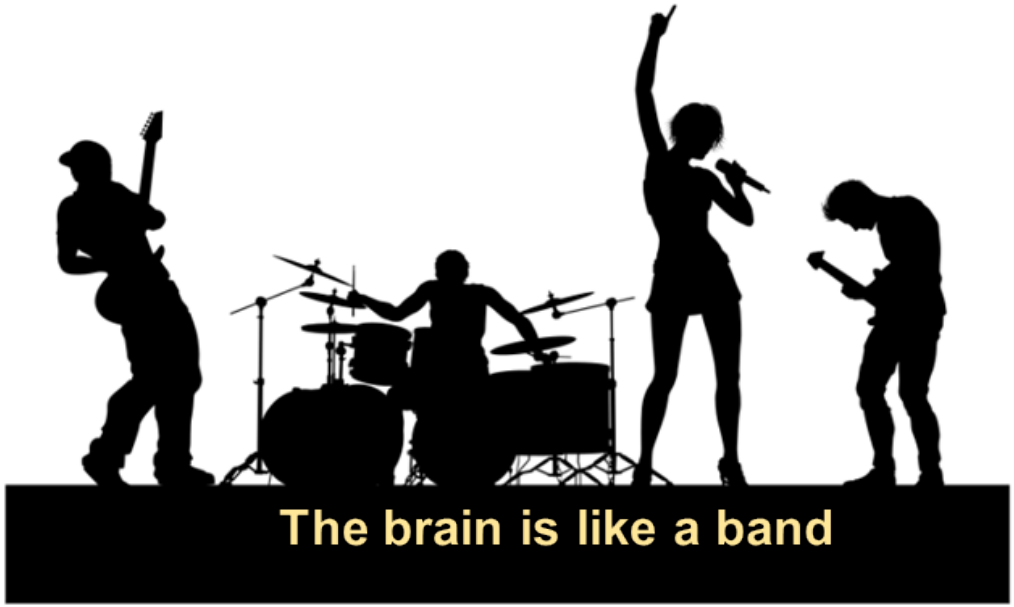


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Element #1
A Framed Approach



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Your Brain



SMART



ANXIOUS

EMOTION



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Smart Brain

Lead Singer



✓ **Biological Correspondence** = Frontal Lobe



(medium.com)

✓ **2 Goals:**

- Satisfaction
- Regulate the rest of the band

✓ **How Works:**

- Thinks about our life, our wants, and our values and develops goals
- Explores what the other band mates are saying and tries to create healthy solutions to keep the band working well

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Emotion Brain



(iStockphoto.com)

Guitarist



- ✓ **Biological Correspondence** = Limbic System that runs throughout brain
- ✓ **Goal:**
  - Needs
  - Happiness
- ✓ **How Works:**
  - Thinks about what we need and what will make us happy
  - Thinks about the quickest way to get our needs met

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Emotion Brain (Continued)



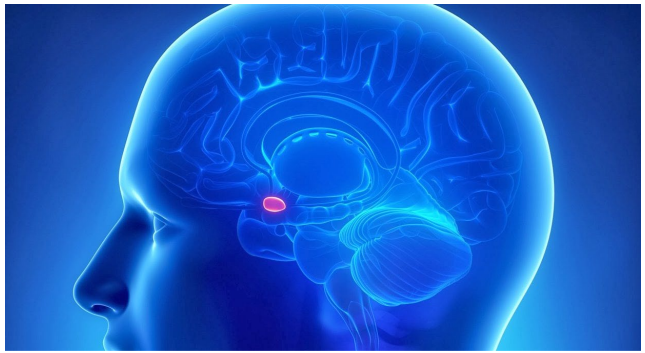
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Anxious (worry) Brain



(iStockphoto.com)



Drummer

✓ **Biological Correspondence** = Amygdala (and part of the Limbic System)

✓ **Goal:**
- Safety (sounds the alarm)

✓ **How Works:**
- Tries to avoid all danger
- When danger can't be avoided, prepares us to fight
- Freezes when it experiences too much anxious energy

Name the Part of the Brain



- ✓ I just heard getting good sleep helps, I am going to work on my sleep.
- ✓ If you try to go to sleep, you will have a bad nightmare, don't do it.
- ✓ No, worry brain, I can do this
- ✓ I'm so angry right now, I'm going to just leave and never come back.
- ✓ Everyone is hating your presentation, just end it early.

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Mental Health & the Brain

Smart Brain



Mental Health Issue
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Impulse Control Issues

Emotion Brain





Mental Health Issue
- Emotion Regulation / Anger Management
- Substance Use/Abuse
- Stress Habits

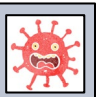
Anxious Brain



Mental Health Issue
- Social Anxiety
- Panic Disorder
- Separation Anxiety
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- All Phobias

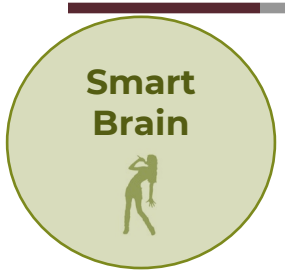
Mental Health Issue
- PTSD

Mental Health Issue
- Depression

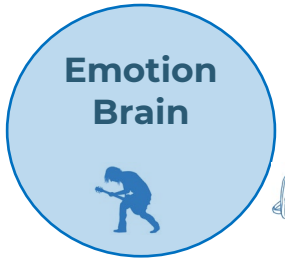


Signs & Brain Location of Mental Health Issues

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Attention Issues
- Difficulty focusing
- Can't sit still - a need to be moving
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty managing impulses



Emotion Regulation Issues
- Gets easily reactive and upset about situations
- Heavy Substance Use/Abuse
- Emotions get the better of student in class

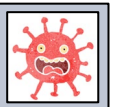




Anxiety Issues
- Avoidance
- Academic performance does not match actual ability (i.e. poor test taker)
- Frequent body (physical) complaints
- Seems to lack confidence
- Frequent need for assurance
- Always thinks the worst will happen
- On alert or on edge

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):
- Headaches
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Flashbacks
- Hypervigilance
- Problems focusing
- Crying spells

Depression



- Hopelessness
- Withdrawn
- Shutting down
- Change of behavior
- Change in grooming

Vary the Model depending on developmental level

Early Elementary School K-2:



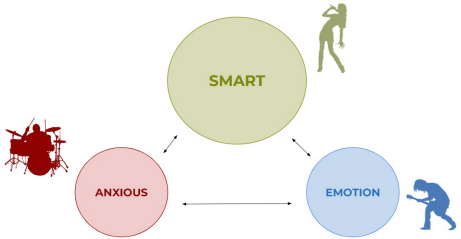
- Can use language of parts of brains
- Job of each part in **simplest terms**
- **May only focus on worry brain**
- (may skip band discussion)
- No Coach Discussion



Elementary (3 to 5) - Middle:



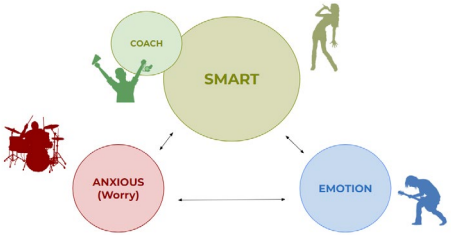
- Use language of parts of brains
- Job of each part
- **How band interacts together**
- (include band discussion)
- **Typically leave out coach**



High School:



- Use language of parts of brain
- Job of each part of brain
- How band interacts together
- (include band discussion)
- Include Coach (new concept)



(Photos: iStockphoto.com)

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Practical Application



- Incorporate the language - smart brain, emotion brain, and anxious (worry) brain into all activities
- Try to recognize which part of the student's brain may be impacted and develop a plan to help
- Talk with student's about the band in their head
- Teach students about the jobs of the 'band members' (different parts of their brain) and what they are trying to do
- Engage your students in 'band checks' or check in on the back pack (associated with the emotion brain)

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Quick Vignette

Lila is a 6-year-old brought to you by her parents because she is refusing to back to school. She notes that the last time she went to school she felt like she was going to throw up and it was the worst feeling she ever felt in her life. She also notes that her heart was racing, and she thought she was going to die. Additionally, at one point it was so bad she felt like she was floating above her body watching all of this. She is not going to go back to school because she is afraid that she will feel this way again.

Based on our discussion, what would be the most appropriate early clinical impressions/diagnosis for Lila?

If we are correct, how would you frame this conversation to Lila to discuss what treatment may look like?

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Quick Vignette

Evan is a 16-year-old brought to you by her parents because he is having difficulty focusing in class. He has trouble sitting still and staying on topic. He loses items all the time and parents note that teachers have always made remarks about this, but it has never really been an issue until now. Evan also notes that he performs poorly on tests even though he has studied a lot. He notes that his mind goes blank on tests. He really wants to do well to get into a good college. Overall though, he continues to be mostly in a good mood, sleep well (except the night before a big test), eat well, and enjoys hanging out with friends and playing his sports. Parents do note that he has become a little more irritable lately as well.

What would be the most appropriate early clinical impressions diagnoses/s for Evan?

If we are correct, how would you frame this conversation to Evan to discuss what treatment may look like?

Element #2- Approach Mental Health as a Skill

Skill Building & Skill Teaching

	Phase 1 Acquisition	Phase 2 Competence	Phase 3 Mastery
Phase Defined By:	Teaching Target Skill and Practice Under Easiest of Conditions	Practicing Skill Under Varying Conditions	Can Use Skill In All Environments without Much Thought
Concluded:	Student / Client Can Demonstrate Skill & Share When Hope Use the Skill	Student Can Demonstrate Skill in Different Environments and Conditions Including Target Environment	Student/Client can Demonstrate Skill In All Environments & No Need for Prompting or Support
Amount of Support	Complete Support in Target Environment	Some Support	No Support
Expectation	No Expectations that Skill Will Be Shown In Target Environment	Mixed Success over time in Target Environment	Full Success
How Provider Does This	Teaching / Fun Education Story Telling Metaphors to Explain Skill	Games, Play Targeting Skill, Increasing Intensity, Amount of Time and Areas That Doing the Skill	Harder Practice in Environments Beyond What Is Expected, Really Try To Challenge Skill Use

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Quick Vignette

Liam is a 12-year-old who struggles with getting overly angry and upset to the point of disrupting class.

You have taught him calming tools and ways to recognize his anger / learning to make healthy choices. You now play the stay calm game where you know what makes him angry and you do those things with him for a certain amount of time. He is now up to 2 minutes of staying calm without getting upset.

What phase of help is Liam?
(Acquisition, Competence, Mastery)

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Quick Vignette

Evan is a 6-year-old who continues to go into other spaces and touches them. He also has issues paying attention and staying on task. This has led to numerous trips to the principal and other admin staff. The staff continue to remind Evan that touching people is off limits and send him to the principal consistently when there is a boundary violation.

What phase of help is Evan?
(Acquisition, Competence, Mastery)

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Practical Application



- Recognize and support that behavior change will not occur until in at least the competence phase
- Try to recognize what skills are needed to help support development
- Help parents/collaterals/schools with expecation management around the process of change
- Make parents/collaterals aware of how practice is important to see skill development
- Remember that competence develops with the more you can “scrimmage”

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Interventions Mental Health In Kids

Smart Brain

- Organization
- Planning
- Listening
- Impulsivity
- Focusing
- Time Recognition
- Interpersonal Skills

Emotion Brain

- Emotion Identification
- Emtion Regulation / Emotional Control
- Zones of Emotion
- Healthy Choices
- Habit Reversal Training
- Cleaning Out Backpack

Anxious Brain

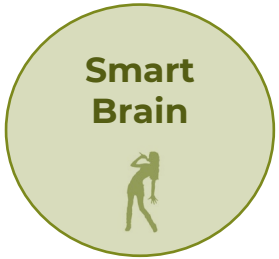
- Anxiety Identification
- Scaling Anxiety
- Calming tools
- Identifying and Challenging Anxious Thoughts
- Approach Skills
- Exposure Work

PTSD:

- Zippers in the backpack
- Anxiety Work (see anxiety)

- Reduce Isolation
- Active Coping
- Depression Propoganga Fighting
- Active Lifestyle
- Hope Instillation

Key Favorite Interventions (1 of 3)



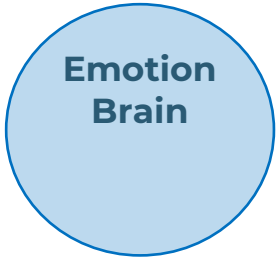
- **Vegetables** (pushing through): Doing things that are hard that help your mind grow

When hear vegetable challenge: take 2 breaths and remind that can do hard things

- **Good decision question** (impulsivity): what will I ask myself before I make a decision?
- **May I game** (impulsivity): I can do anything that is safe as long as I say May I and ask
- **Strategy gameplay** (impulsivity): play a game but have to share your strategy before each move
- **Red Light Listening** (focus): When I say red light, you have to freeze, repeat back request, and comply with request
- **Listening challenges** (focus/attention): when I say listen challenge if you can repeat back what heard you get X
- **Prioritization Matrix** (organization): use with highschoolers and adults to help plan
- **Backpack checks** (organization): literal checking of backpack and helping kids work on their organization

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Key Favorite Interventions (2 of 3)



- **Feeling Pies** (emotional awareness): take feelings of inside out, make a circle and have to fill in the pie with how feel and then talk about it
- **Backpack checks** (emotional awareness): what is in my backpack? How heavy is my backpack from 1-10?
- **Healthy emotional playbooks** (emotion regulation): pick a feeling and come up with the healthy way to manage the feeling, recognize the quick emotional urges
- **Small, Medium, Big Feelings** (emotion regulation)**:** Show and demonstrate small, medium and big types of feelings, practice having control
- **Type of problem** (emotion regulation)**:** teach concept of small, medium, and big problems, recognize and practice that need to have an emotional response proportional to the type of problem
- **Calming tools (emotional regulation):** teach notion that calming tools are first step to get smart brain on-line, each person has to have **2!!!!!!**

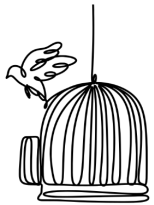
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F Step Skills

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Reducing Physiological Arousal (Calming skills)



Body	Mind	Senses	Release
• Breathe • Stretch • Exercise • Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	• Visualize • Ground • Humor • Mindfulness • *Distraction	• Touch Objects • Music • Lotions • Scents • Remove Stimuli • Cold Water	• Vent • Share • Journal • Creative Outlet

5 Rules for Calming Skills

1. They must work
2. They don't draw attention
3. They are safe
4. They are portable
5. They do not lead to avoidance

Key Favorite Interventions (3 of 3)

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Anxious Brain

		Step	Description	Skills
	F	FEEL	Identify anxious feelings and reduce anxiety arousal	• Emotion Identification • Scaling • Calming Skills
	A	ACKNOWLEDGE	Acknowledge and attack your worries	• Acknowledge • Attack
	C	CHARGE	Charge ahead and DO what you are avoiding	• Stair Steps • Problem Solving • Rehearsal • Skill Building • Courage Skills
	E	EVALUATE	Evaluate and enhance motivation	• Learn from experience • Motivate yourself

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A Step Skills (1 of 3)

Anxious Brain

Attack

Attacking Skill	Statements For Elementary & Middle School Students	Concepts for High School Students
Perspective	"Worry Brain, I can do hard things."	"10" Future Me Matter in 15 Years
Evidence	"Worry brain, how do you know?"	Proof Probability
Values	"Worry brain, you are not going to bully me around."	Mission in Life Knowing My Why
Tricks	"Worry brain, I see your trick it is not going to work this time."	Calling Out Worry Brain Tricks

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A step skills (2 of 3)

Hot Seat

Middle School Example

Attack:
How to Practice



Set Up the Exercise

1) Ask the student to identify/share their worry thoughts with you.

2) Establish the anticipated length of time for the exercise.

3) Explain that you will now be the 'worry brain' and their job is to talk back to you.

Engage in the Exercise

1) Adult - Pick one worry thought to speak out loud to the student.

2) Student - Talk back to the worry thought.

3) Engage in 3 to 4 rounds of this, using 3 to 4 student identified worry thoughts.

** TIP - *If the student gets stuck, (this happens a lot), slow down and help them figure out what they could have said that would have worked and resume the exercise*

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A step skills (3 of 3)

Attack: How to Practice



(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLc3uzw77s4)

Coaching Script: Based on the model

F: FEEL Feeling Anxious?

"Do you accept this challenge?"
"What level is your anxiety right now?"
"Do we need a calming tool or is your smart brain online?"

Calm the anxiety until the smart brain is back online

A: ACKNOWLEDGE Acknowledge & Attack your Worry Brain

"What are your worried thoughts?"
"I will be your worry brain now, challenge me."

C: CHARGE Charge Ahead & Choose the Right Battle Skills

"What skills would help us overcome the anxiety right now?"

select from below based on the situation

- Problem Solving
- Rehearsal or Teaching Tools
- Courage Skills
- Break it Down to Small Steps

E: EVALUATE Evaluate & Enhance Motivation

"Was your anxiety right?"
"How can we keep your anxiety from being a sore loser?"

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Watch & Learn

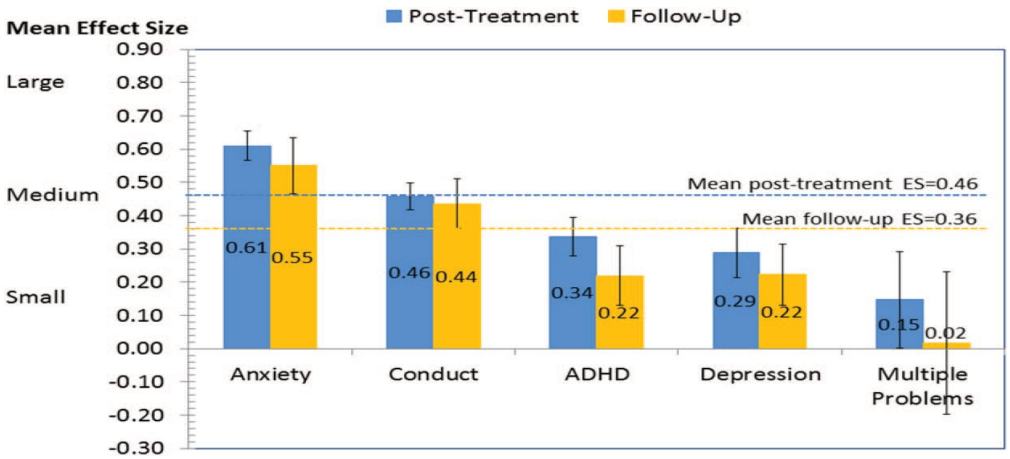




(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYOuEcaxTCs)

Key Anxiety Treatment Point

- Anxiety is the one area that a skill approach is **required**
- **Anxiety** will not improve unless there is an exposure element embedded into practice
- **Skills around anxiety** yet without an exposure element the skills will fall flat!



What Five Decades of Research Tells Us About the Effects of Youth Psychological Therapy: A Multilevel Meta-Analysis and Implications for Science and Practice.

(Weisz et al., 2017)

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Element #3- Enhance Motivation

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Making Skills Stick

- ✓ Practice can be boring so you must **incentive** with **rewards**
- ✓Make learning fun!
- ✓Kids learn most through play, games, modeling, storytelling, and rehearsal. Use all of these avenues
- ✓Remember to have empathy – learning any skill takes time



(iStockphoto.com)

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Vignette

Thomas is a 14-year-old who deals with Autism (Level 1) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Parents have brought him for support on all of these areas. In school, they are mostly concerned about Thomas's emotional outburst, lack of willingness to do any work or engage, and that he seems to not get along with his fellow students. Thomas has a hard time staying focused and sitting in his chair. He gets very disruptive in any transition, especially transitions that require Thomas to move outside of the classroom.

What phase of help is Thomas?
(Acquisition, Competence, Mastery)

Now that you understand the model, what key brain areas would you focus on, and what skills specifically might you employ?

Now develop a treatment plan / progress monitoring tool to help you organize the work.

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Working Plan

Target Area	Plan Phase	Intervention	Progress
Emotion Regulation	Acquisition	1. Calming Tools 2. Stay Calm Challenges	N/A
Lack of Work Production	Acquisition	1. Vegetable 2. Anxiety Tools	N/A
Focus	Acquisition	1. Red Light Listening 2. Focus games	N/A
Social Skills	Acquisition	1. Door openers 2. How to be a friend	N/A
Transitions	Acquisition	1. Curveballs or switch	N/A

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Session Flow

Session	Outline of Session
1	Rapport Building / Introduce Band Develop Reward System Develop Tracking System
2	Check in on Points Reward in Session (competence building) Review Band Emotion Tool (calming skill/practice) Smart Tool (vegetable/practice) Social Tool (door opener)
3	Check in on Points Reward in Session Emotion: Introduce/Practice new calming tool (competence building) Stay calm challenge Introduce Feeling Pie Smart: (Competence) Harder vegetable Introduce Red Light Listening Social: Door Opener practice (competence) Use Door Opener in conversation

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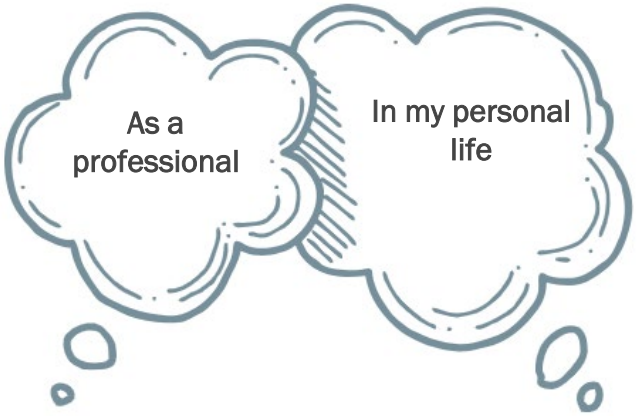
Key Takeaways- Practical Application

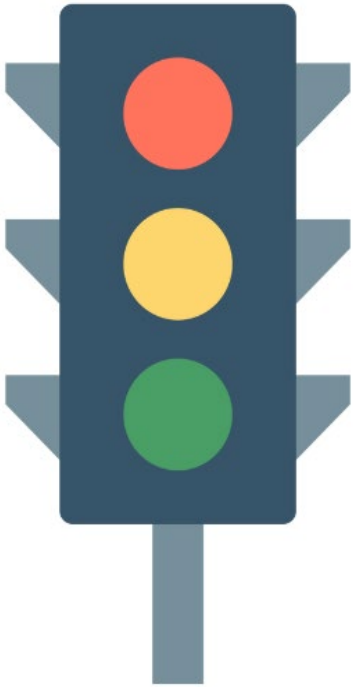


- Design plans to promote skill competence/mastery
- Be flexible and adaptable in your plans based on response
- Recognize the need for practice outside of session for change to truly stick!
- Make it fun so kids want to come back!

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Stoplight Reflection





✓Stop Doing?

✓Keep Doing?

✓Start Doing?

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Questions?

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