



# Hurried & Worried: Understanding Children's Anxiety

Knowledge is Power  
Consulting & Wellness Services 

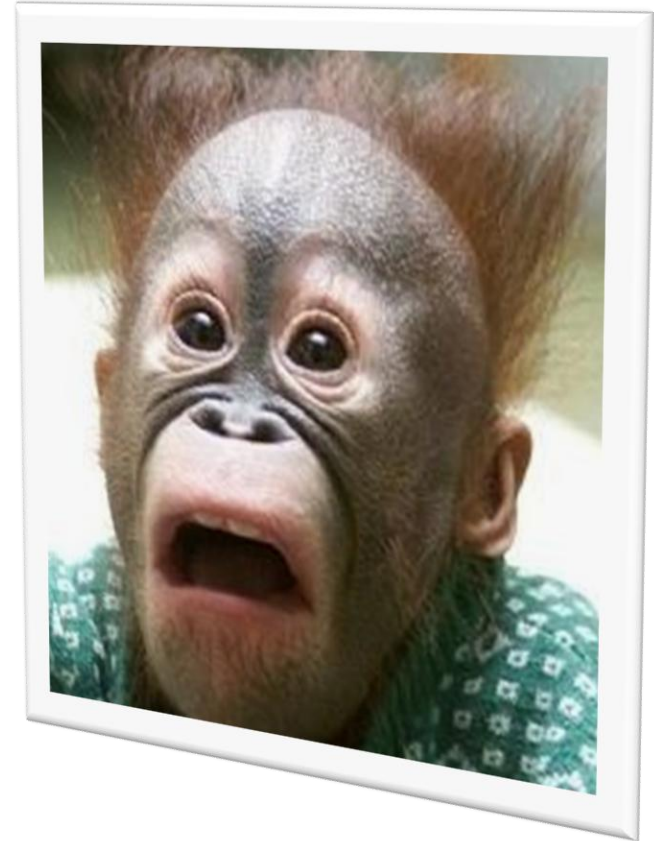
# We all have ANXIETY!!!

- What causes you anxiety?
- What caused you anxiety as a child?



# What is fear?

- Normal emotional response that helps us survive.
- Natural response to a stimulus that poses a threat to our well-being, safety or security.
- A physical arousal that occurs preparing us to neutralise the threat by fighting or fleeing from danger



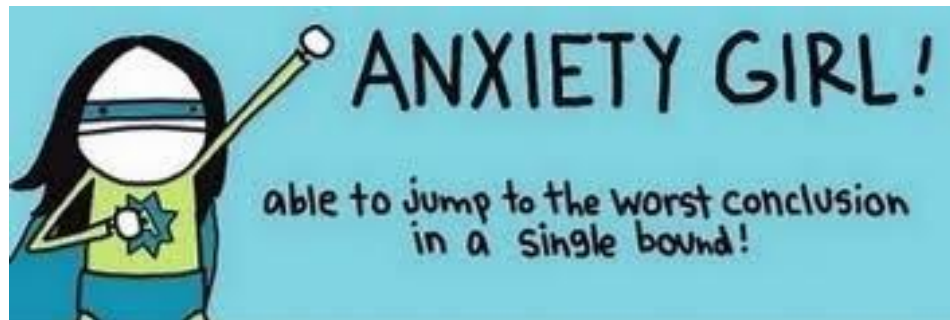
# Normal Developmental Fears Across the Lifespan



- **Infancy** – Strangers, loud noises
- **Early Childhood** – Separation, monsters, the dark, storms
- **Middle Childhood** – Real world dangers, new challenges
- **Adolescence** – Normative period of heightened self-consciousness and worry concerning attractiveness, social competence, negative evaluation and not fitting in. A critical period for friendship development, peer group identity, personal identity

# Fear vs. Anxiety

- **Fear** tends to be experienced in the presence of a real *immediate* danger



- **Anxiety** is a fear response in *absence* of, or out of *proportion* to a threat. Anxiety tends to be associated with worrying about the *future or past* difficulties, rather than an immediate situation.

# Anxiety can be Adaptive

- Mild to moderate levels of physiological arousal can help you to perform optimally:
  - On tests
  - Before a presentation
  - In sports and other performance activities
- If we didn't feel anxious, we would never get anything done!



# Anxiety is...

## **Psychological**

Emotional – fear, panic, agitation, nervousness, uneasiness, apprehension.

Cognitive – worry, negative thoughts, poor concentration, attentional biases.

## **Physical**

Increased heart rate, muscle tension, perspiration, stomach aches, sleep difficulties, etc.

## **Behavioural**

Flight (escape or avoidant behaviours)

Fight (approach behaviours)

Freeze/ Fidget

Reassurance seeking

NORMAL FEARS → ANXIETY DISORDERS

## When does anxiety become a problem?

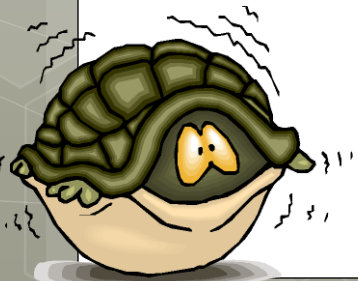
- Is the fear developmentally appropriate?
- Does the fear cause significant distress?
- Does the fear manifest longer than normal/ duration?
- Does the fear interfere with daily living & relationships?

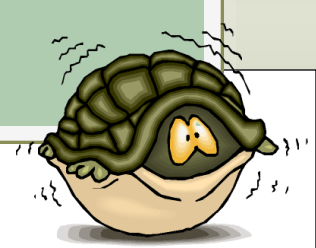




# Different types of anxiety disorders

- **Separation anxiety disorder** (2 – 5 %)
  - Excessive anxiety concerning separation from home or from person who they are attached
- **Generalised anxiety disorder** (3 – 4 %)
  - Excessive and or unrealistic worry or feelings of general apprehension about events or activities
- **Social Phobia** (2 – 3 %)
  - Irrational and continuous fear of performing in social situations.
  - Fear of humiliating or embarrassing self and being negatively evaluated by others





- **Specific Phobia** (5 – 7 %)
  - Excessive and irrational fear of specific object or situation.
- **Panic disorder** (3 – 5%)
  - Recurrent unexpected panic attacks (discrete period of intense fear and discomfort) and concern about having attacks
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder** (2 – 3 %)
  - Recurrent obsessions and compulsions severe enough to be time consuming

**Anxiety is highly co-morbid – 65-95% have more than one anxiety disorder (Last et al., 1996)**

# Symptoms of Anxiety

## Excessive:

- Worry (anticipatory)
- Avoidance
- Attention to threat
- Fast/sustained physiological arousal
- Psychosomatic complaints
- Difficulty in resting and going to sleep
- Shyness
- Social withdrawal
- Perfectionism
- Behavioral outbursts
- Anger



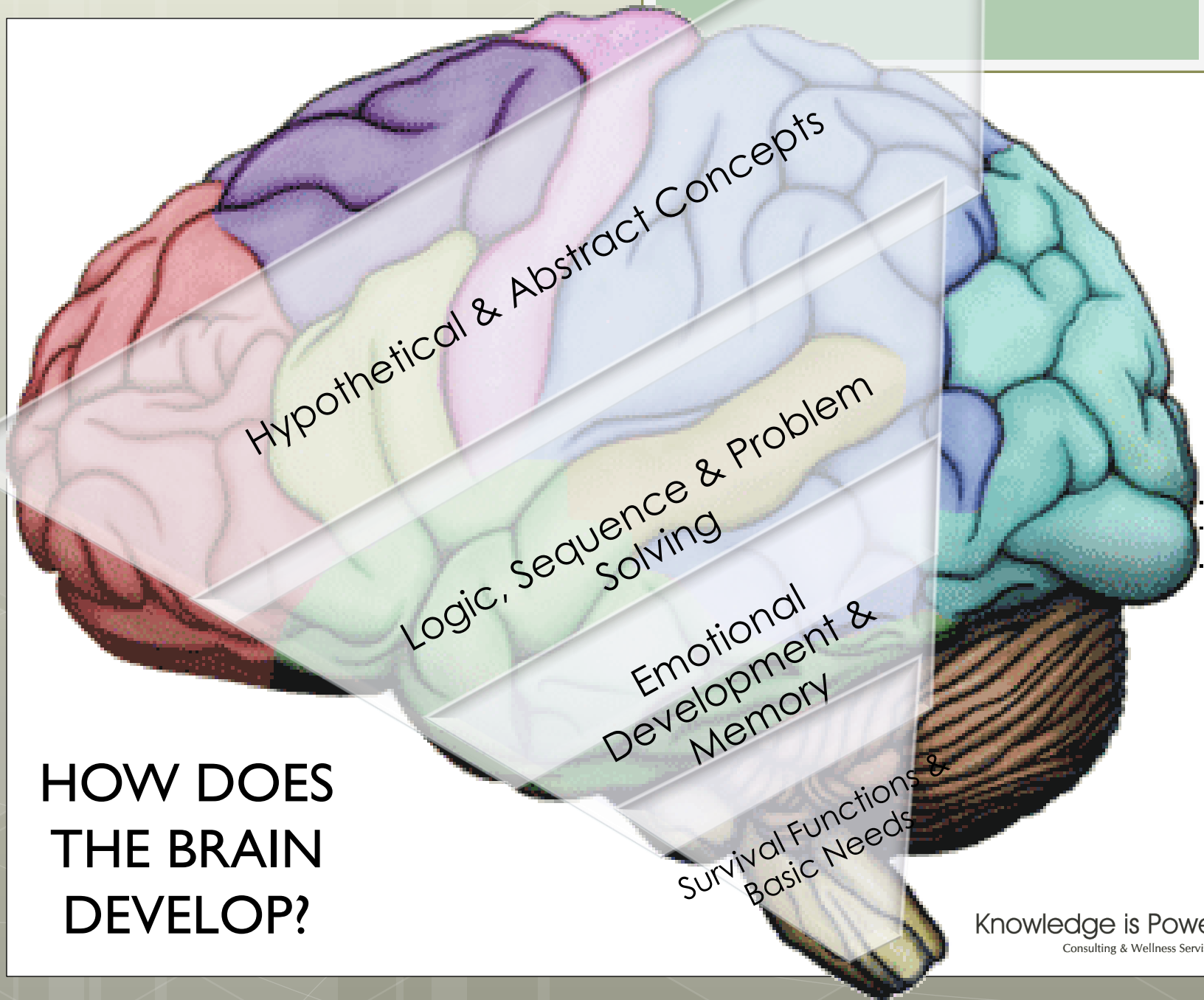
# Behaviors Associated with Anxiety & Depression

- ✓ Avoiding new things or taking risks
- ✓ Escaping from feared situations
- ✓ Frequent physical complaints and visits to sick room (especially before particular events)
- ✓ School refusal
- ✓ Distraction and attention difficulties
- ✓ Seeking reassurance
- ✓ Perfectionistic tendencies – frustrated when makes mistakes and when they can't "get it right"
- ✓ Staying close to a familiar person
- ✓ Resisting change, especially in routine
- ✓ Little eye contact
- ✓ Spending a lot of time alone
- ✓ Unwillingness to participate in class
- ✓ Withdrawal and/ or outbursts in behavior



# How Anxiety Affects Learning & Development





# HOW DOES THE BRAIN DEVELOP?

# What can we do?



# Various levels of Intervention

- Medical (physical symptoms & systems)
- Psychological (counselling & therapy – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy)
- Self-Help & Support Systems
  - The 3 C's
    - Connection
    - Competence
    - Control
  - Physical Coping
    - Sleep/ Diet/ Exercise
    - Breathing/ Heart rate and physical response mgm't
    - Rest & Recovery
    - Meditation (brain rest)
  - Behavioural Coping
    - Fight & Flight behaviour management/ replacement
  - Intellectual Coping (Mind/ Thoughts)
    - Planning/ problem solving/ researching
    - Journaling
    - Reading
  - Emotional Coping
    - Self Care
    - Talking with friends/ family
    - Processing & validating emotions





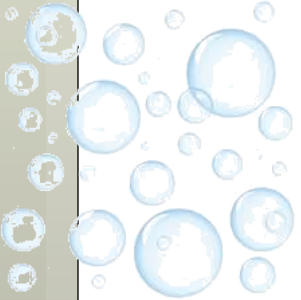
## Using CBT as a foundation, we teach:

- A positive sense of self
  - Identity
  - Self-esteem
  - I am special
- About their feelings
  - Emotional & Physical
  - Give them words and outlets
- About their thoughts
  - Red thoughts vs. Green thoughts
  - Positive Self talk
- Things they can “do”
  - Coping strategies
  - Relaxation/ Ways to feel good
  - Knowledge and a Plan



# Teaching Body Awareness & Relaxation

- Body Clues
- Bubble & Birthday Cake Breathing/  
deep breathing
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Yoga
- Pizza Massage
- Feel Good Recipes



# “Red” Thoughts = STOP!

Unhelpful, negative, pessimistic “red”  
thoughts = unhappy feelings.

**I can't do  
it! It's too  
hard.**

**They will  
laugh at  
me.**

**I'll never  
learn to  
ride a  
bike.**

**No-one  
wants to  
play with  
me.**



# “Green” Thoughts=GO!

Helpful, positive, optimistic

“green” thoughts = happy feelings



**I can do it!**

**I am a  
good  
friend.**

**I will be  
brave**

**I am good at  
lots of things.**

## Some important things to note about red and green thoughts

- It's okay to have red thoughts – everybody does. But we want to have them less often. What's important is what we do with our red thoughts (i.e. turn them into green thoughts!).
- Green thoughts need to be **realistic**. They do not mean we are lying to ourselves.
- Green thoughts don't always necessarily make you feel good, but they can make you feel better, especially in very difficult situations.
- Changing red thoughts to green thoughts *takes effort*. It requires constant **practice, persistence and encouragement**.

# Thoughts from a Kindergartner



# PIZZA MASSAGE!



Thank you

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