



Supporting Anxious Children

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2021

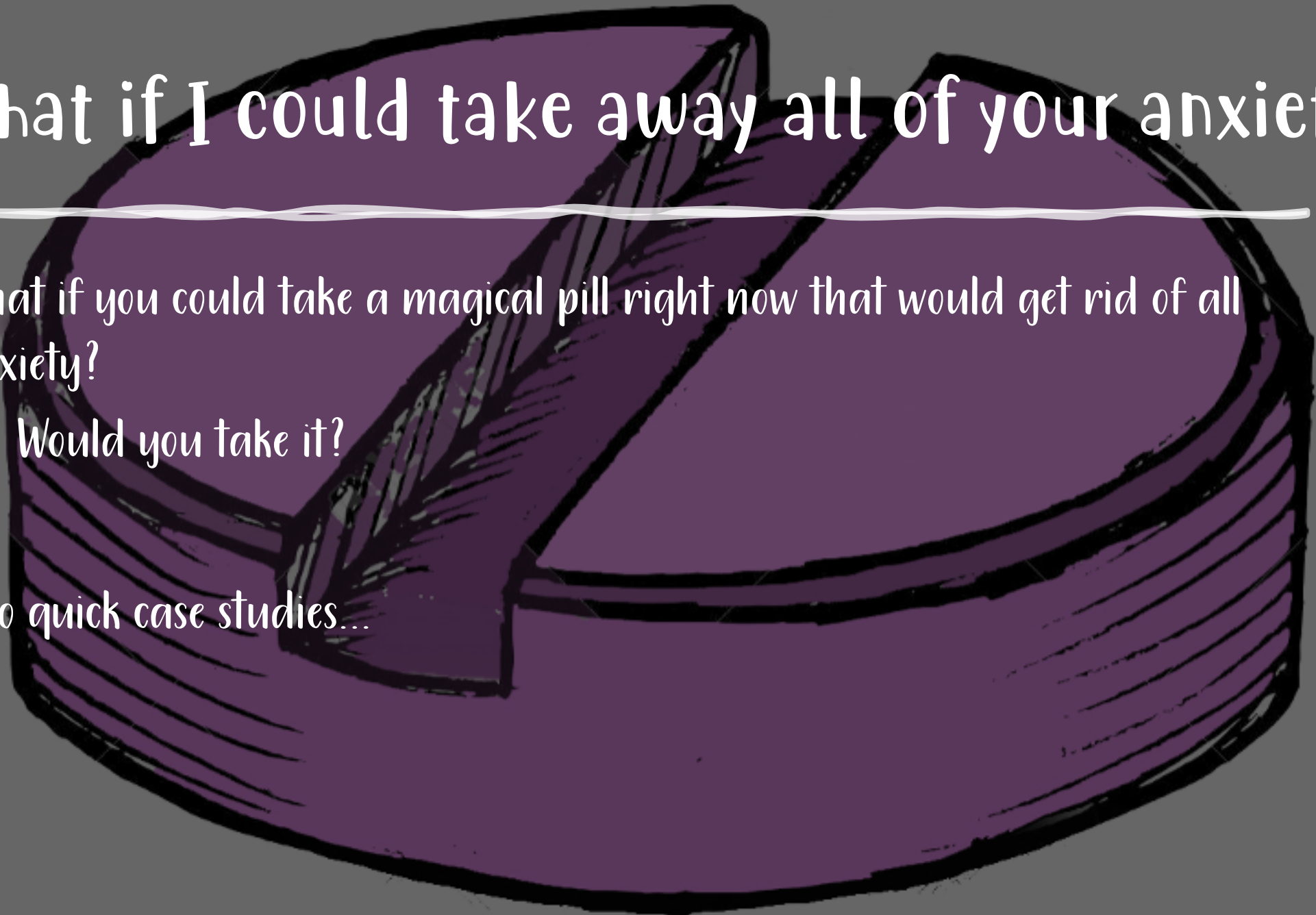
What to Expect

- WHAT IF WE COULD GET RID OF ALL ANXIETY?
- BRAINS!
- HOW DOES ANXIETY WORK?
- WHEN IS ANXIETY PROBLEMATIC?
- **5 ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR HELPING ANXIOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH!**
- WHAT TO DO WHEN KIDS FREAK OUT!
- COVID AND ANXIETY
- POSTMODERN ANXIETY
- POST TRAUMATIC STRESS
- KIDS AND SUICIDE



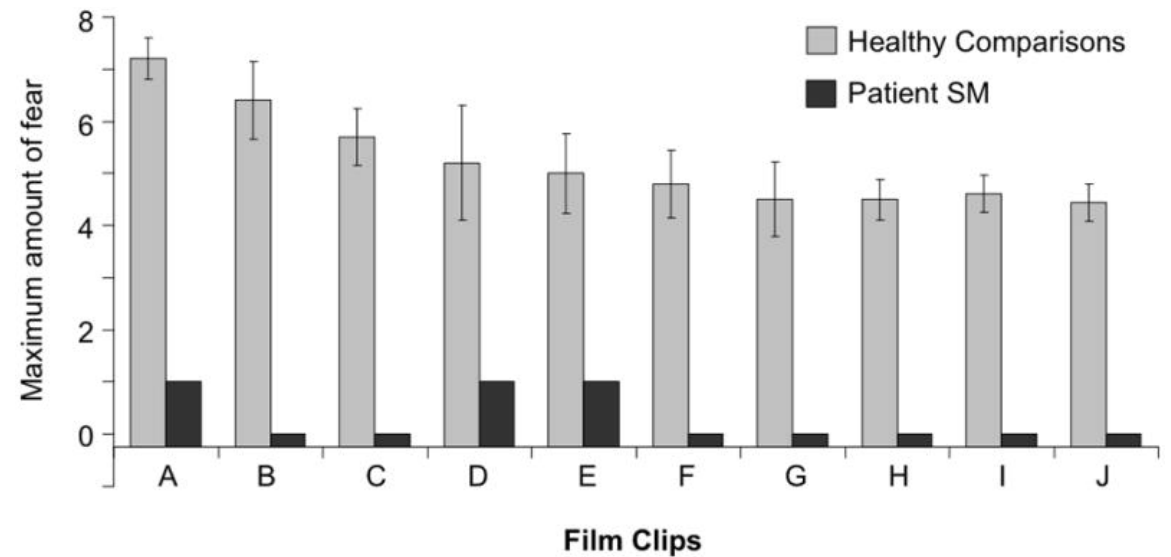
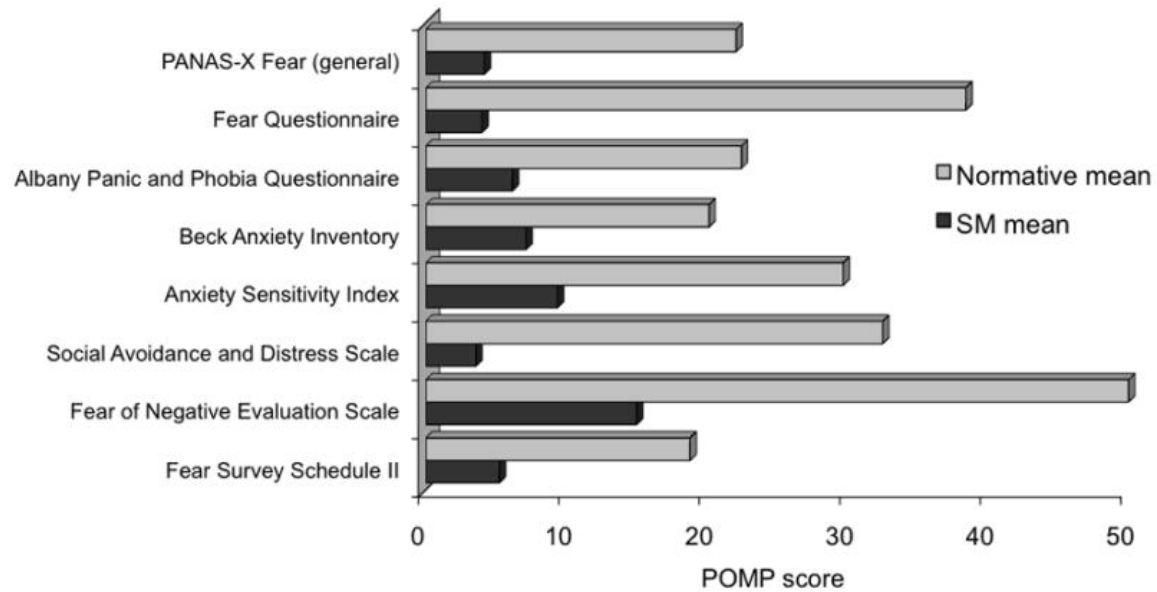
What if I could take away all of your anxiety?

- What if you could take a magical pill right now that would get rid of all anxiety?
 - Would you take it?
- Two quick case studies...

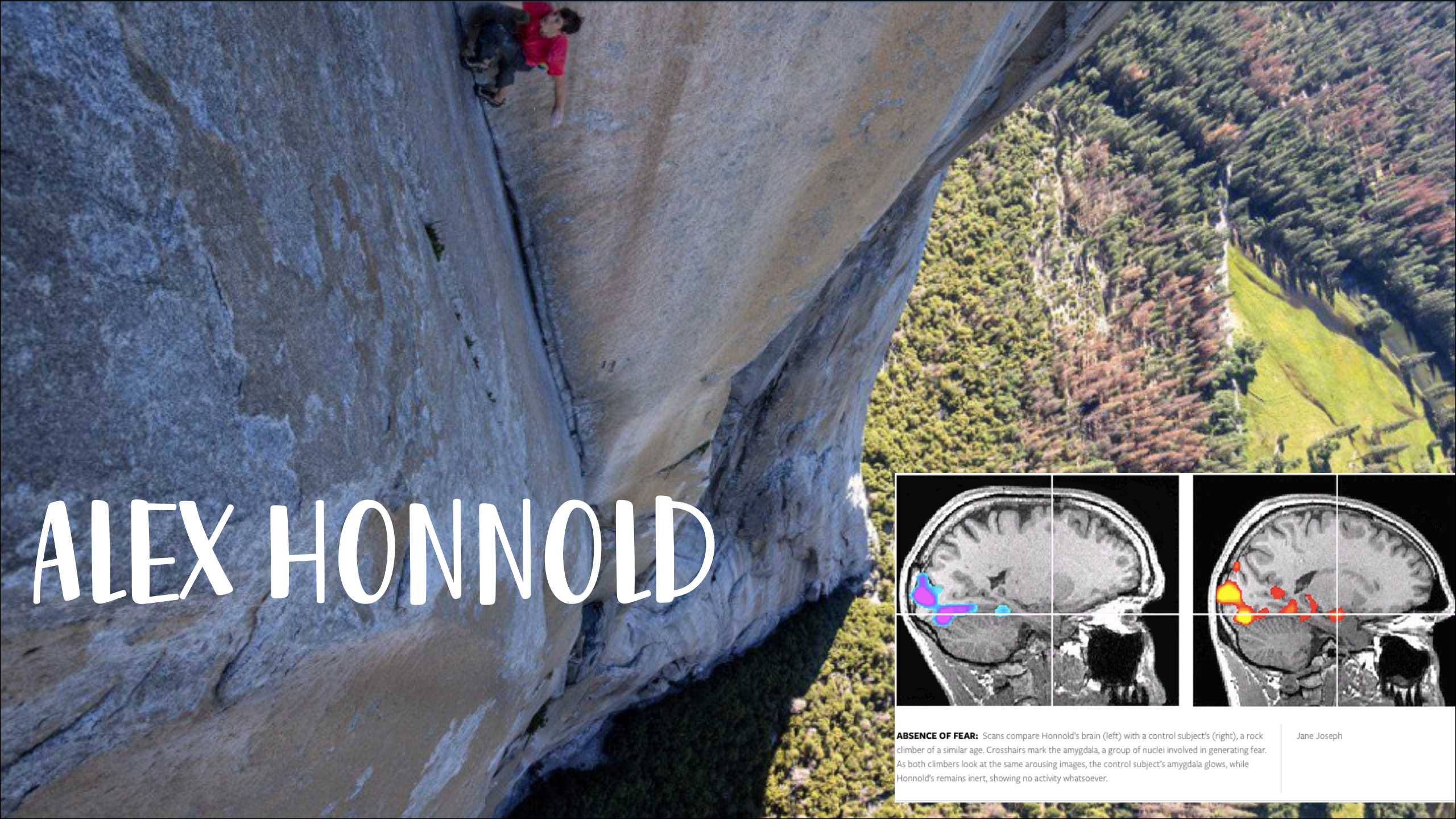


Patient SM

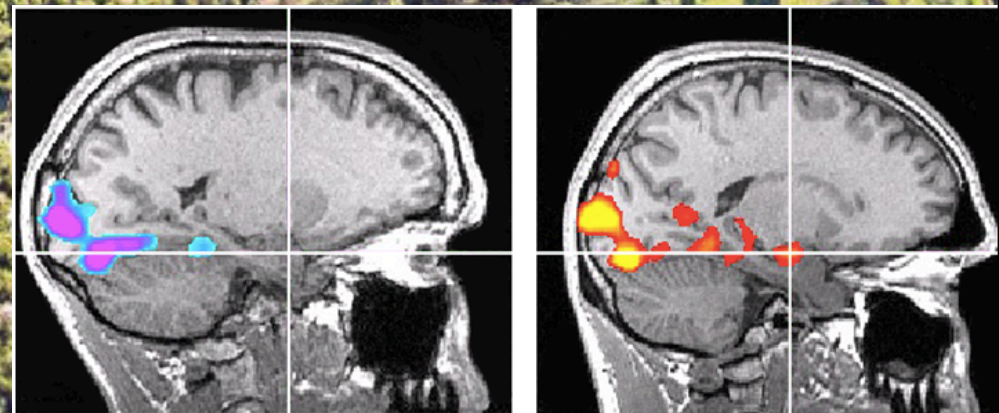
- Urbach-Wiethe Disease
- "Fearless" due to bi-lateral lesions of the amygdala



Feinstein, J., Adolphs, R., Damasio, A. & Tranel, D. (2011). The human amygdala and the induction and experience of Fear. *Current Biology*, 21(1), pp.34-38



ALEX HONNOLD



ABSENCE OF FEAR: Scans compare Honnold's brain (left) with a control subject's (right), a rock climber of a similar age. Crosshairs mark the amygdala, a group of nuclei involved in generating fear. As both climbers look at the same arousing images, the control subject's amygdala glows, while Honnold's remains inert, showing no activity whatsoever.

Jane Joseph

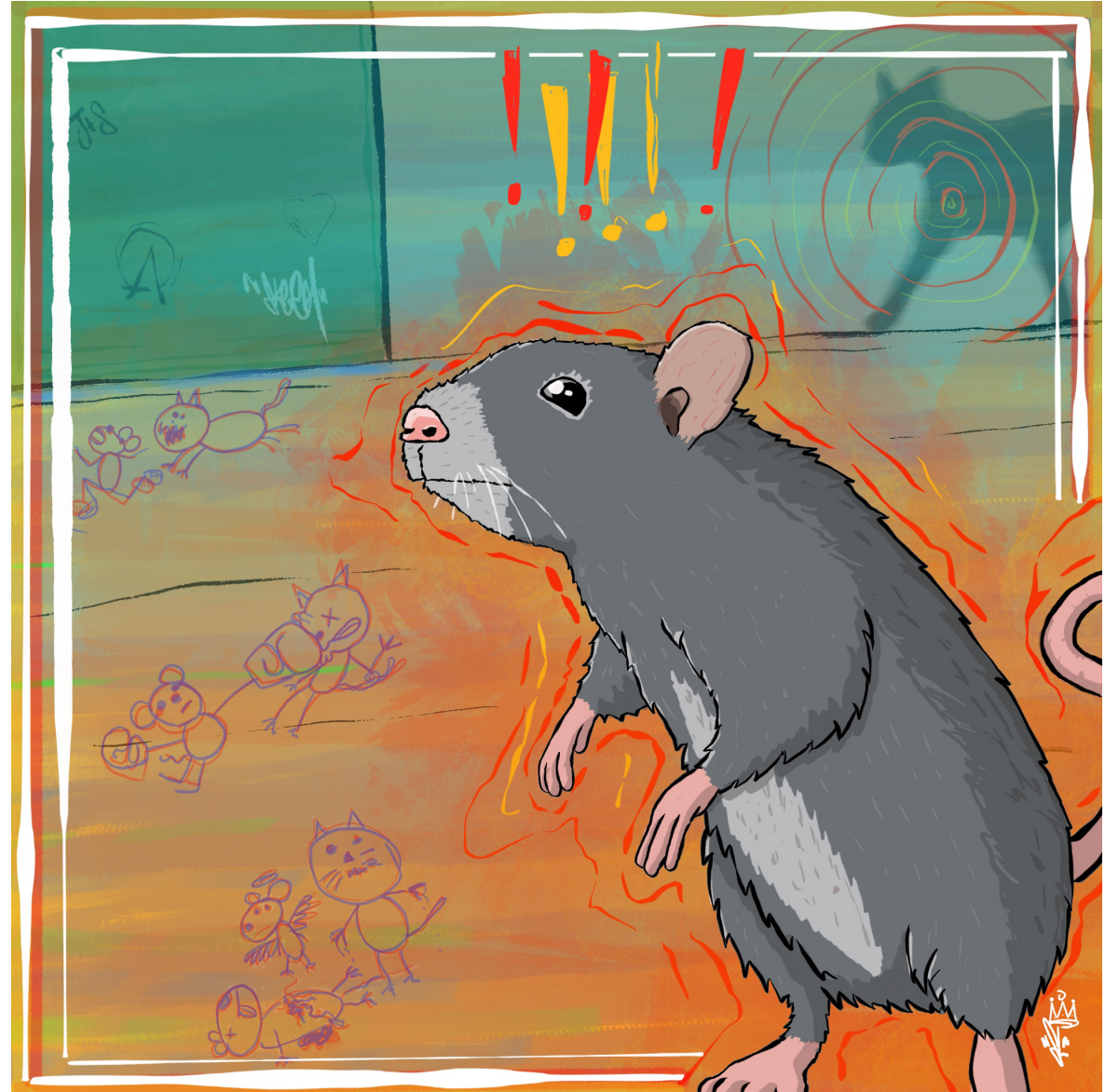
Kids are Snowflakes

- "Every [Child] is in certain respects
a. like all other [Children], b. like
some other [Children], c. like no
other [Children]" (Allport, 1953)
- The goal is to be equally curious
about what works for all kids, what
works for some kids and what is
unique about your own child...



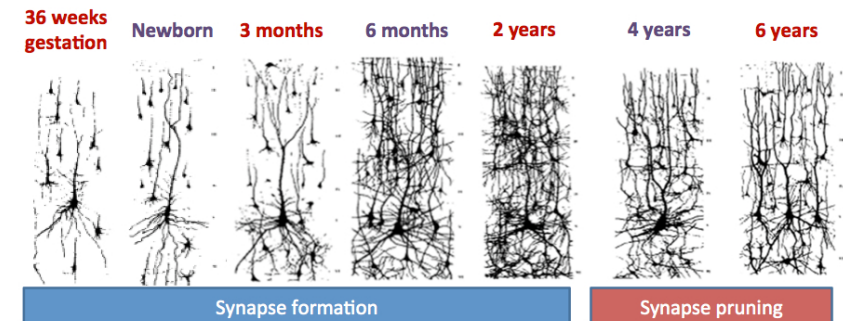
What is Anxiety?

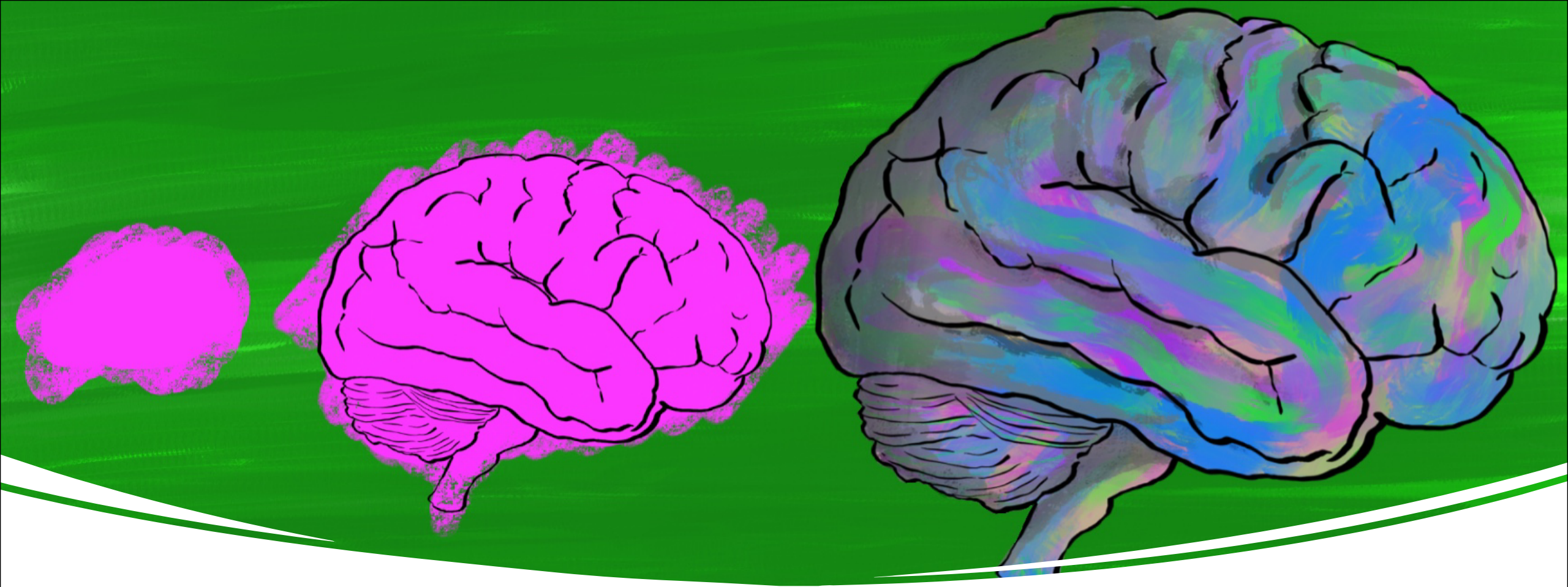
- Anxiety is an emotion
- Emotions are good
- Emotions influence "motivated behaviours" that draw people towards things good for themselves or their species and repel them from things that may be harmful.
- ANXIETY IS AWESOME!!!



Developing Brains

- Brains start with more material than they need
- Brains organized through use
 - Synaptic formation and pruning
- Organization continues till mid 20's
 - Myelination





The Brain of a child

- In the moment (State Generalizing)
- Poor time travelling
- Limited regulation
- Poor planning
- Intense emotional experience
- Constantly developing



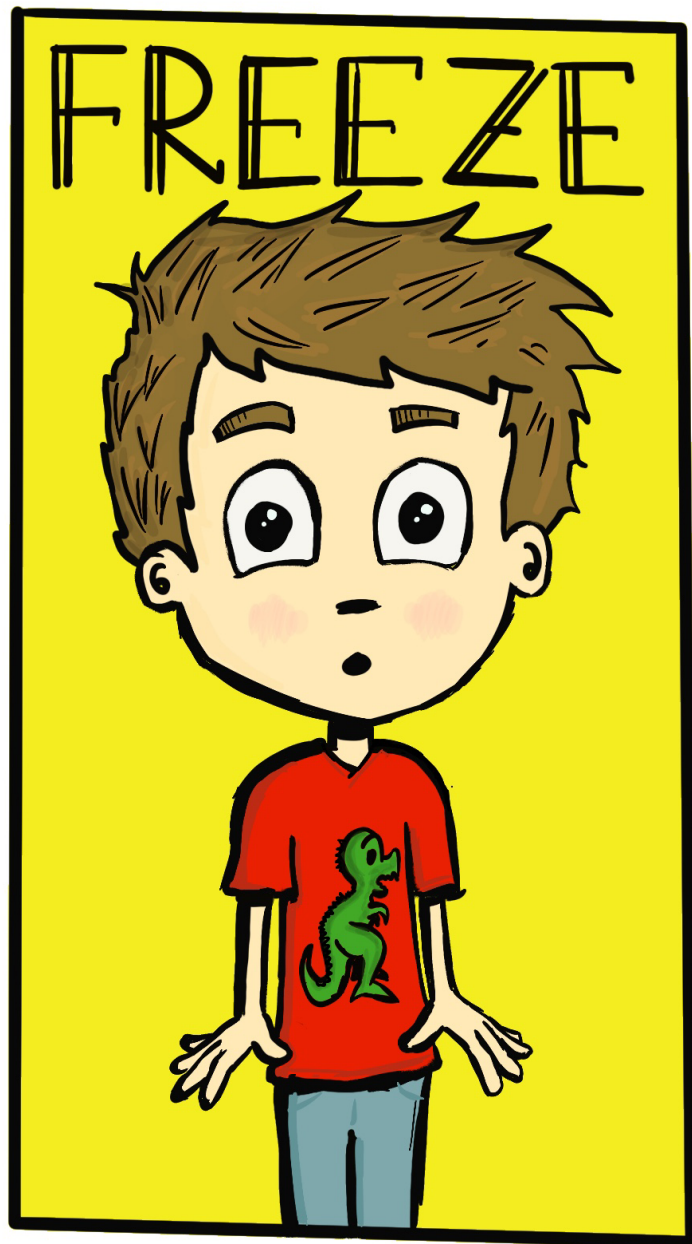
Teenage Brains

- Poor Planning (Under-developed cortex)
- Increased reward for risk
- Emphasis on social ranking
- Fragile sleep routines

Understanding the "F" words of anxiety

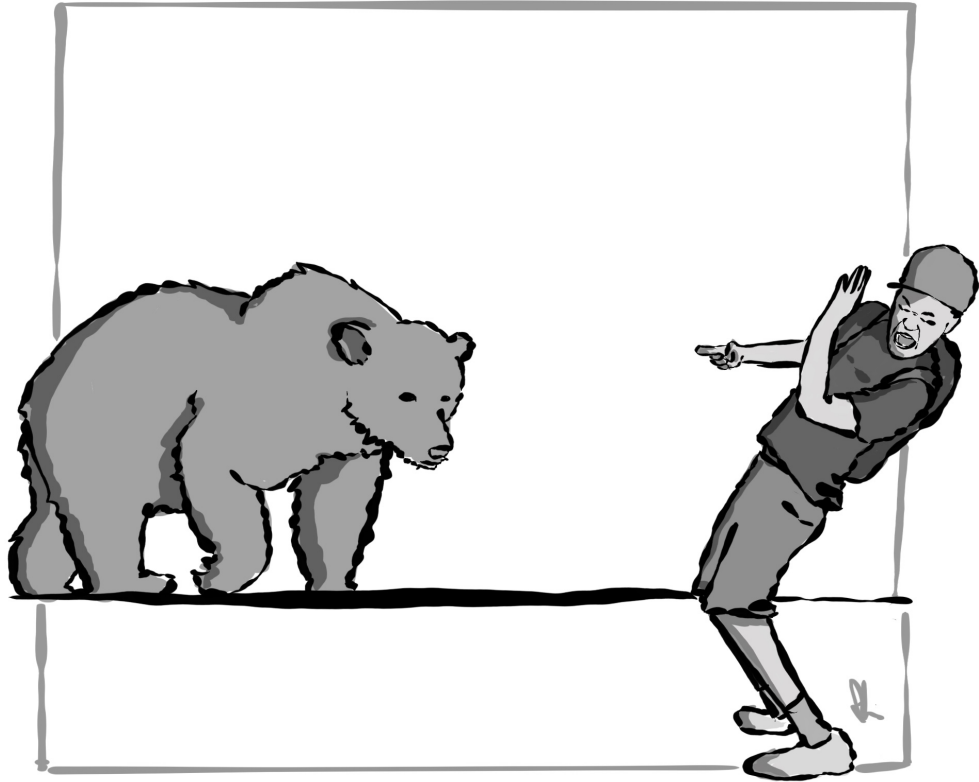
- Anxiety moves us towards things that are good for us and away from things that are bad
- The F words of anxiety illustrate a simple pattern humans follow in doing this





The “F” words of anxiety



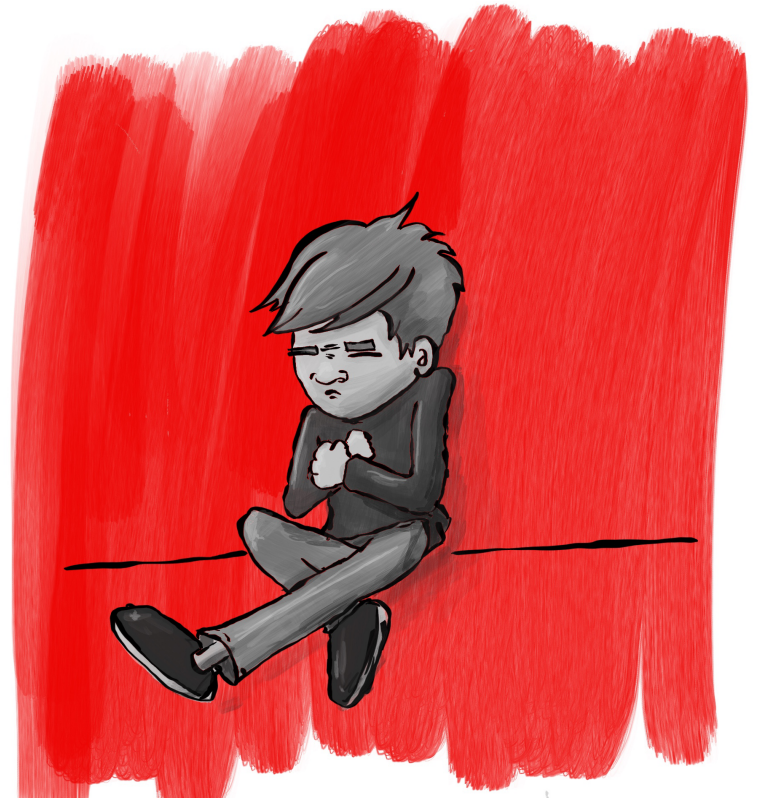


What does it feel like to be an anxious child?

- Imagine you are face-to-face with a Grizzly Bear...
- What feels different in your body?
- What changes in the way you think?
- How do you respond to the world in that moment?

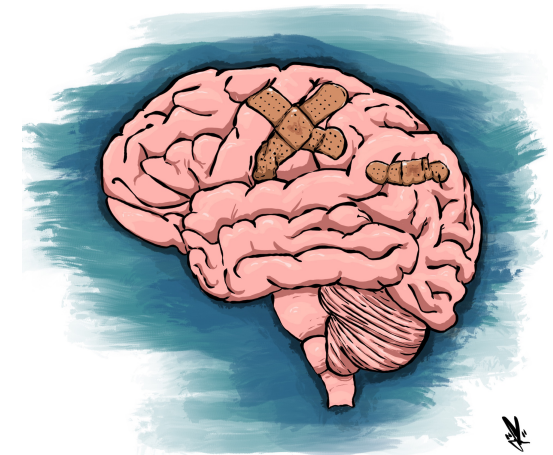
Anxiety in the Body

- Some of the ways the body changes in response to an anxious reaction
 - Elevated heart rate
 - Rapid/shallow breathing
 - Dizzy, nauseous, itchy, tingly
 - Less fine motor control
 - Gross motor strength increases
 - Muscle tension increases
 - Circulation changes

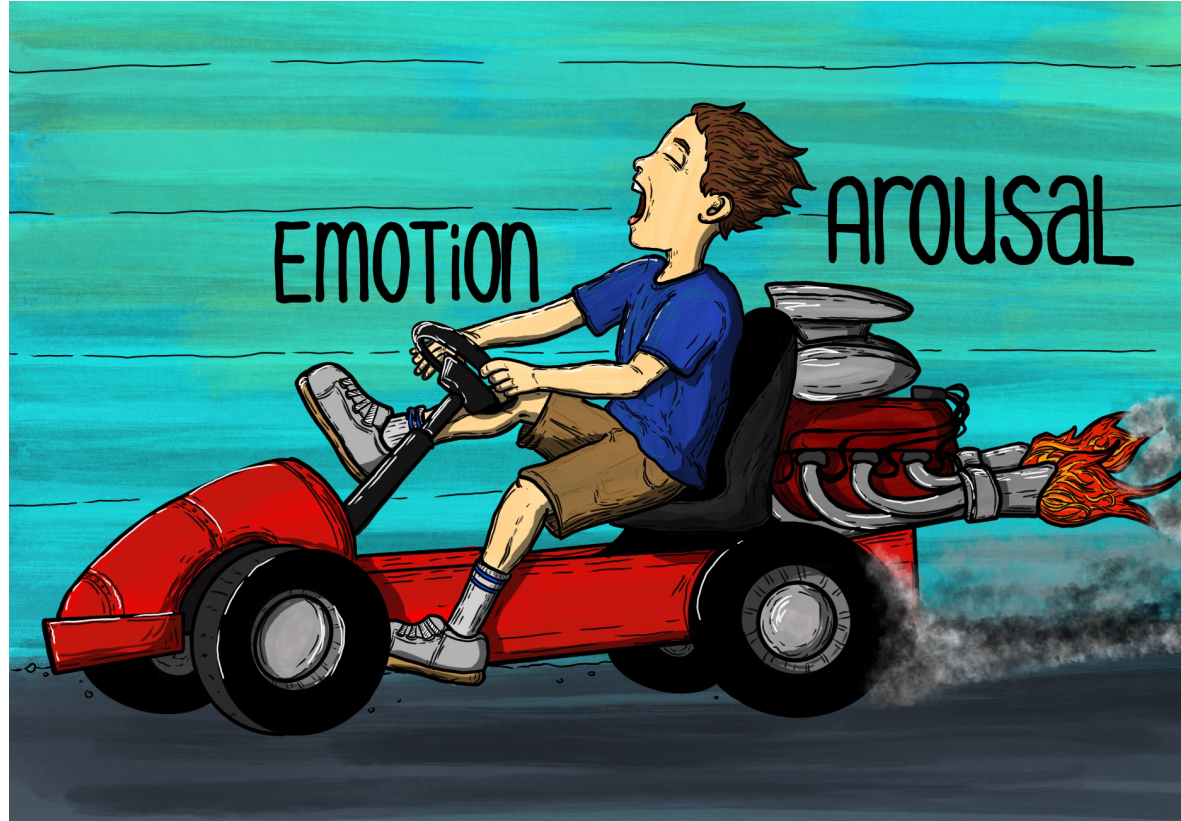


Brains Work Differently In moments of high arousal

- Central nervous system arousal energizes the body
- Activation moves from outer higher regions of the brain to lower inner regions
- Focus on survival
- Deficits in higher cognitive functioning



Emotion & Arousal



- **Emotion** (Direction)
- **Arousal** (Vigor and Persistence (Pfaff, 2005))
 - The energy behind it!

When is Anxiety Problematic?

- When it causes significant dysfunction in necessary areas of functioning
- When it leads to AVOIDANCE of rewarding or beneficial activity



The Many Masks of Problematic Anxiety

- Anger
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Autism Spectrum
- ADHD
- Learning Disabilities
- Speech and Language Problems



Anxiety and Depression

- Anxiety limits the frequency of rewarding activity and the reward experienced in those activities
- Anxiety focuses attention on the negatives



What Can You Do?

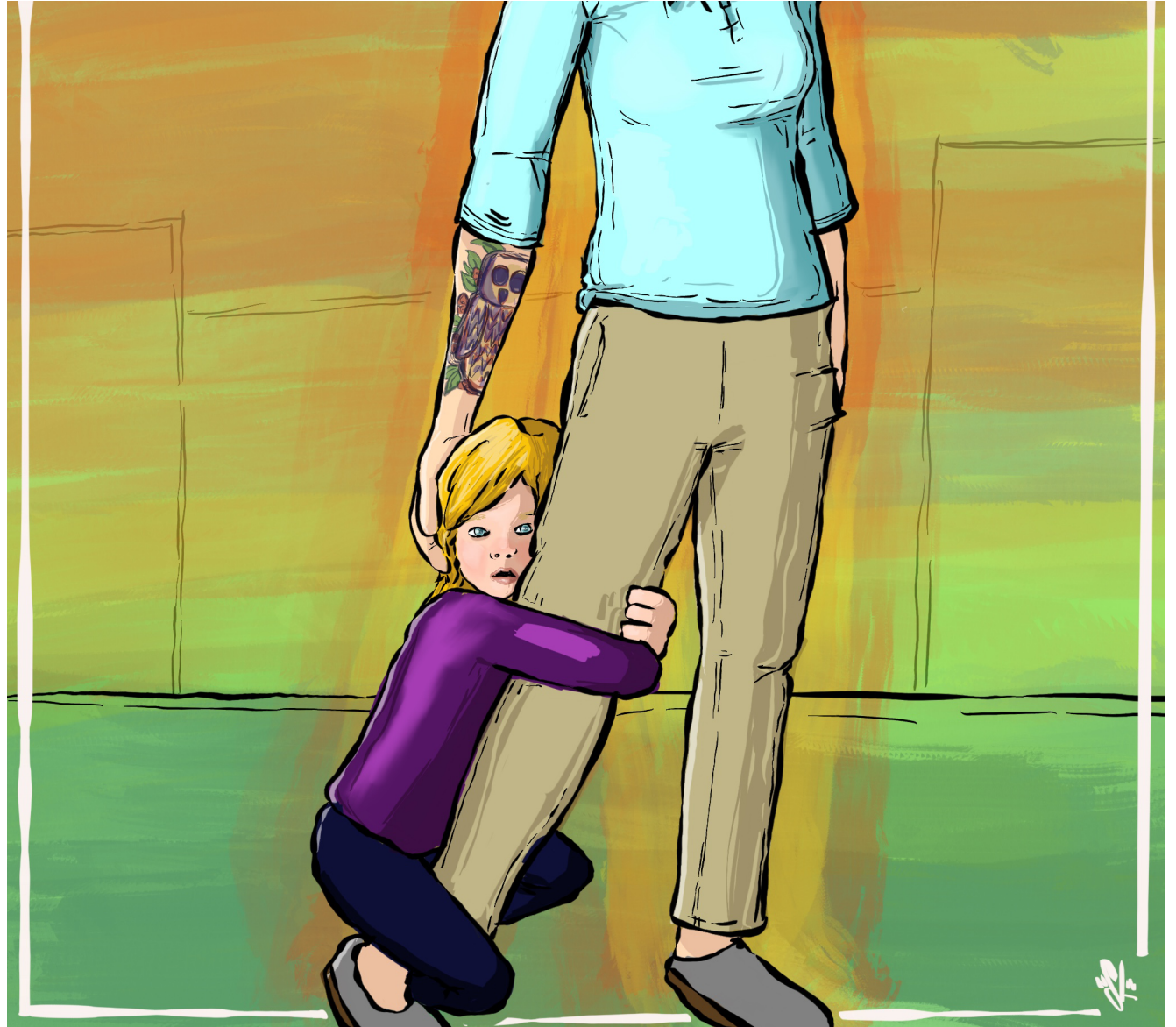
The Basics:

- Routine/ Structure (Predictability)
- Basic Care
 - SLEEP!
 - Diet
 - Physical Activity



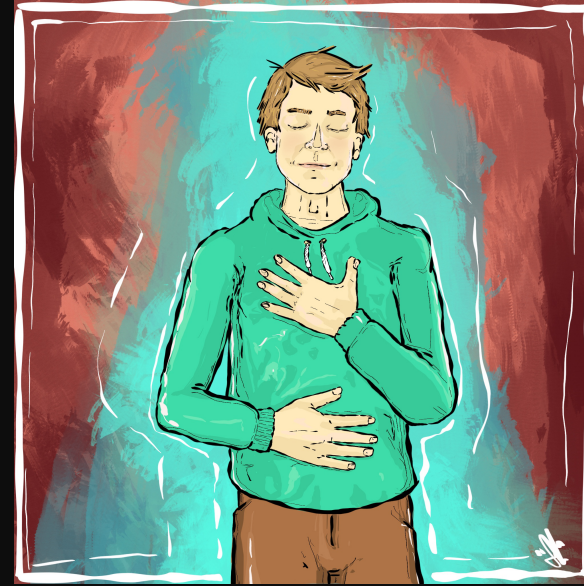
1. Help Children Face Fears!

- Exposure Therapy
 - "Stepladders"
 - Progressive approximations
 - Best as a collaborative process
- Avoidance amplifies anxiety



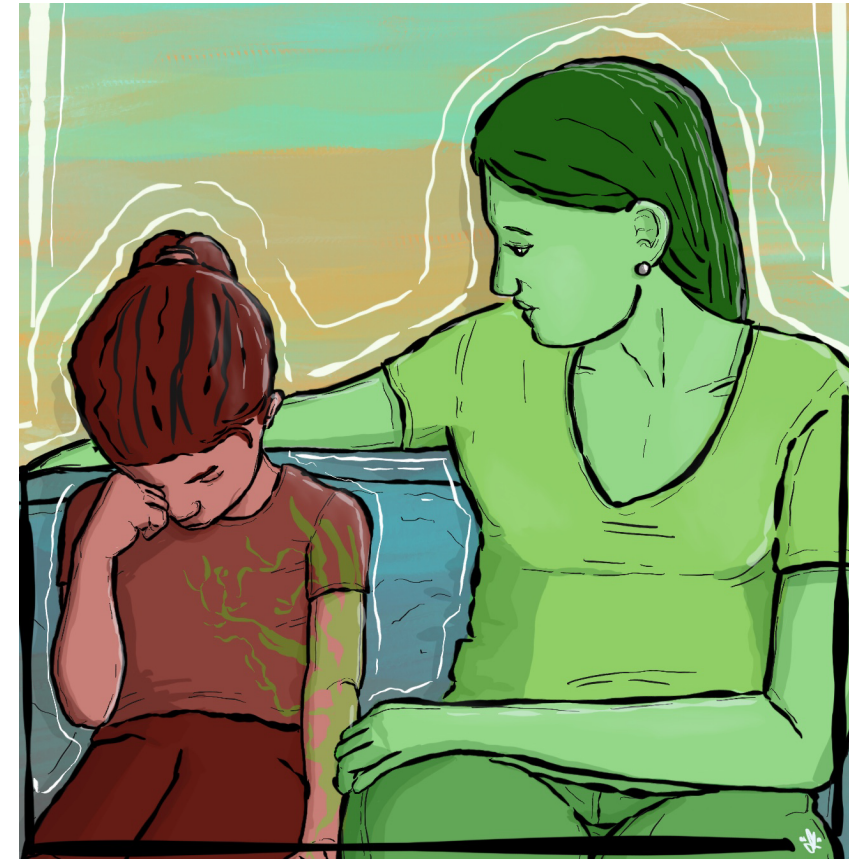
2. Be Mindful and Teach Mindfulness

- Breathing
- Relaxation
- Mindful practice
 - Sensory Stones
 - Body Scans
 - Staring Contests
 - 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding
 - "How does your engine run?"
 - Sensory toolbox building



3. Help Children to Explore Their Emotional Experiences

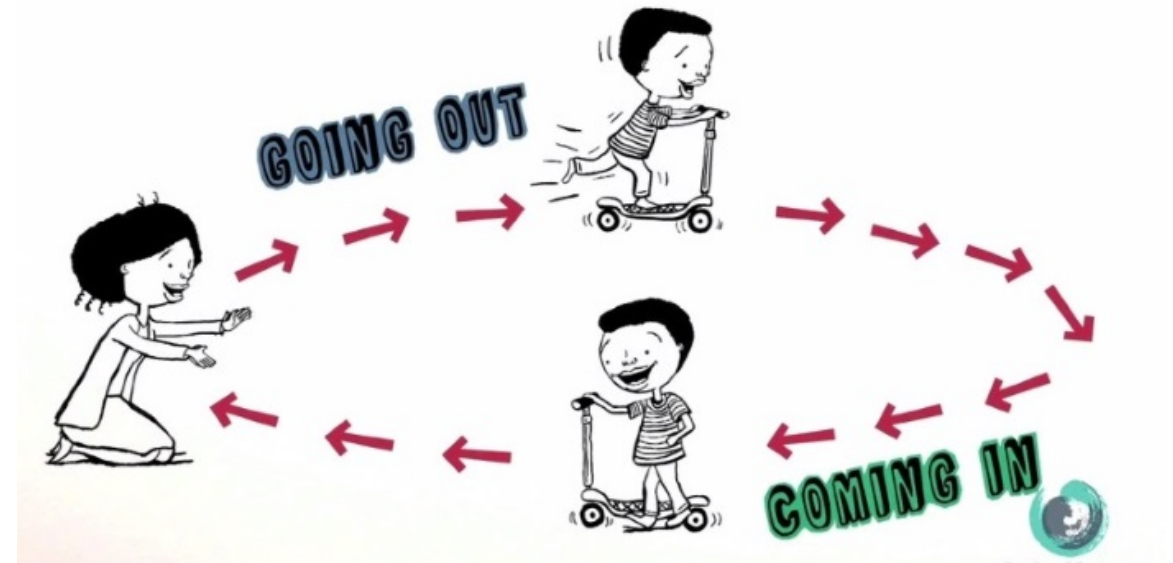
- Emotions are there to help you!
- Explore where they are helping and hindering
- Do not explore emotions when someone is overwhelmed—wait until calm



4. Create a Secure Base!



- Attachment Theory
 - Capacity to regulate emotions grows in safe, reflective relationships
 - Promote growth/be a safe harbor
 - Connect before direct!



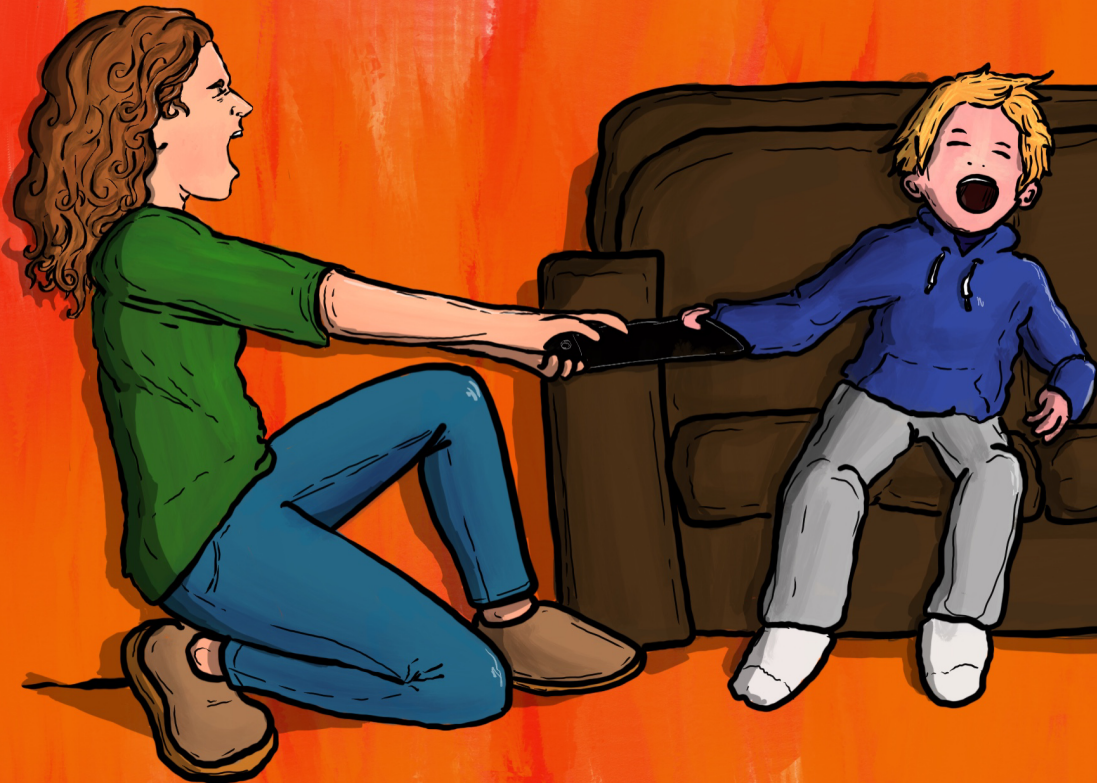
5. Be Arousal Aware! (Trauma Informed)

- Learn what "ramps up" your child and what calms them down
- Collect before directing
- Safe before stimulate
- Follow high arousal activities with low arousal and provide time to regulate
- Practice safe calming activities before implementing into routine



WHAT TO DO WHEN KIDS FREAK OUT!

Our strategies need to change when kids are overwhelmed



When Kids Freak Out!

—Change/control the situation

- Less stimuli
 - Reduce movement
 - Minimize noise

—Allow time

- Arousal is a physiological response that takes time regulate

—Less talk

- Emphasis on non-verbal
- Verbal messages simple
 - Choices?

—Movement

- The body is primed to move
- Restricting movement can increase arousal
- Movement can speed regulation



When Kids Freak Out

- Arousal Mirroring ("Vitality Affects")
- Consequences immediate and natural
- Boundaries based on safety
 - Clear boundaries



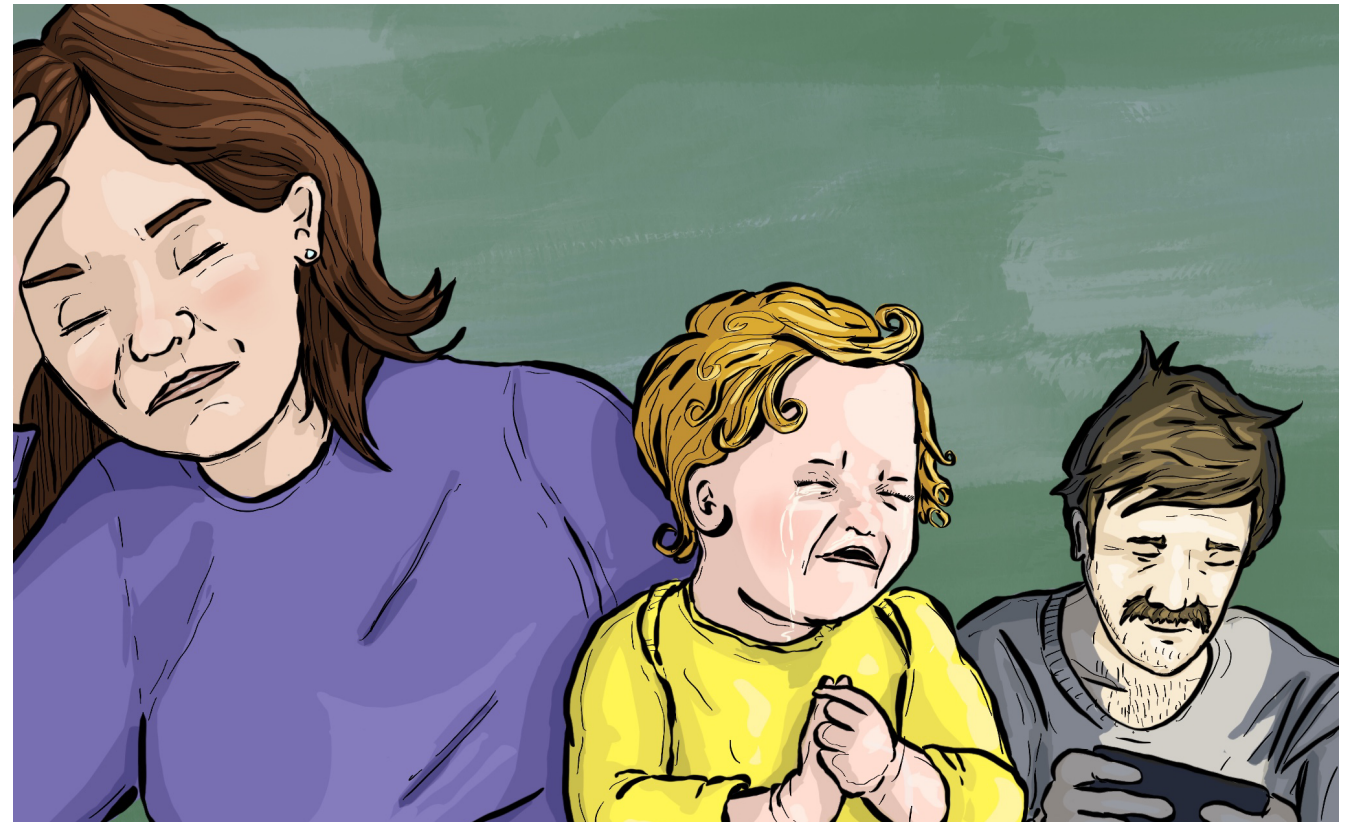
Covid and Anxiety

- Heightened cultural anxiety
- Negativity Bias
- Reduction in demand for some children
- Disruption of routine
- Loss of established coping





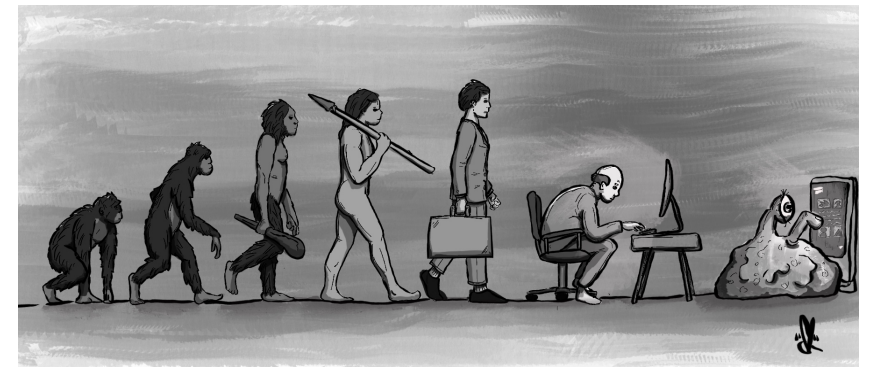
Covid and Anxiety



- Maintain routine
- Be cautious around your own exposure to negative media
- Talk to kids about COVID
- Provide opportunity for connection in safe ways
- Find opportunities to safely challenge kids
- Open and clear communication

Conversations in Post Modern Anxiety

- Caffeine
- Pot
- Interpersonal Communication Technologies
- Videogames





Post Traumatic Stress

- Protective System
- Symptom Categories
 - Hyper-arousal
 - Re-experiencing
 - Avoidance
- Linen Closet Metaphor

Kids and Suicide

- Suicide is a way to end pain
- Children have a hard time guessing the future
- Children often use suicidal language when overwhelmed
- If you worry your child has had thoughts of killing themselves:
 - Help them to regulate and calm
 - Ask them using very clear language: "Have you had thoughts of killing yourself?"
 - Ask them "what do you think it means to die?"
 - Ask them how they would kill themselves?
 - Be safe: listen, encourage exploration of their thoughts in a non-judgemental way
 - Contact a professional if you believe there is a risk
 - Take them to the hospital if that risk is immediate



Help is just a
text away.

Text TALK to

686868

to connect with a
Crisis Responder.

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

powered by

Kids Help Phone 



CONTACT ME?

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