

DR. VANESSA LAPOINTE, R. PSYCH.

## When the worry monster ATTACKS

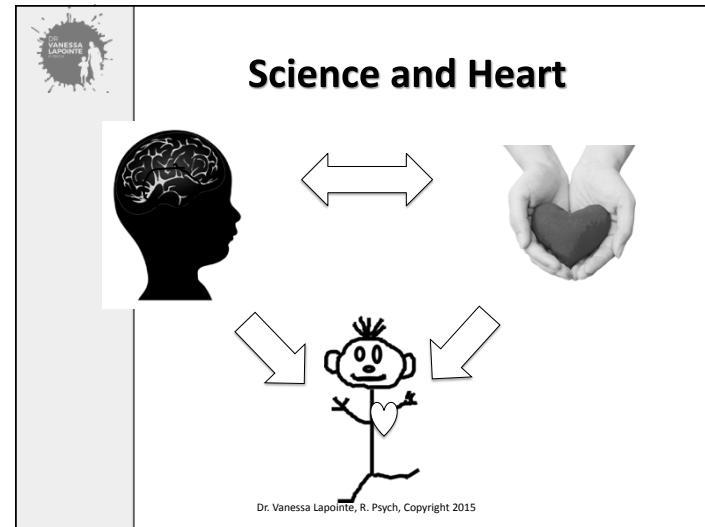
### -Understanding and responding to childhood anxiety-

**The art of *Being* rather than *Doing***

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## Science and Heart



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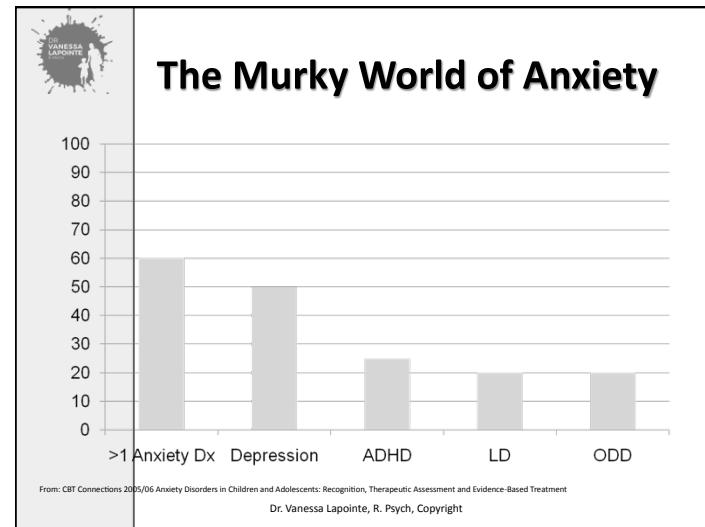
## Anxiety

- Anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed mental health disorders (for children & adults)
- 6.4%
  - 42 000 children in BC
  - 338 000 children in Canada
- Between 12 and 20% of us will be “clinically diagnosable” at some point in our lifetime

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## The Murky World of Anxiety



From: CBT Connections 2005/06 Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents: Recognition, Therapeutic Assessment and Evidence-Based Treatment

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## Anxiety Diagnoses

- Separation Anxiety
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Phobias
- Social Anxiety
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



**Behind the label**

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY

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## Common Threads

- Fear
- "Trauma" (in the eye of the beholder)
- Agitated
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Acting out
- Sleep disturbances – nightmares; can't settle; difficult to rouse in morning
- Increased body stress response – cortisol – can kick off all sorts of other body symptoms
- Safety & security questioned
- Disregulated
- Feel blamed – viewed as "won't" vs. "can't"
- Organization difficulties
- Self-esteem impacted
- Relationships affected
- Attentional regulation is impaired

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## The root of the emotion

## ANXIETY AS "ALARM"

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## Redefining Anxiety

# Anxiety = Alarm

Dr. Gordon Neufeld

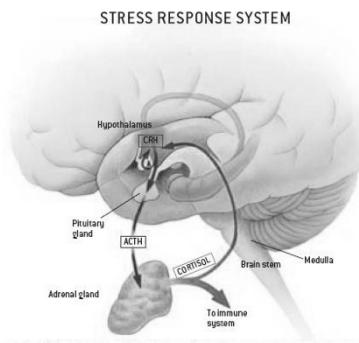
- A healthy, normal and much needed response in the body
- An adaptive response
- Our belief systems drive the continued alarm response
- Becomes maladaptive when no obvious threat is present
- To change this, we need to go to the emotional core

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## The Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal Axis

### STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM



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## Alarm System

### Autonomic Nervous System

Parasympathetic System  
rest and digest

Sympathetic System  
fight or flight



## A note on temperament...



N O R M A L

Generally settled & chill

More intensely aware

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## Shyness ≠ Anxious

- Shyness has an ill-informed bad rap!
- We do NOT want children to do the bidding of a stranger
- Shyness is a developmentally appropriate reaction of a child to a person not part of their inner circle
- Shyness keeps children emotionally (and otherwise!) safe
- We want children to be shy around people they don't really know

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## The adaptive function of alarm

The diagram illustrates the process of the alarm system. It starts with an 'Event' box on the left, which leads to an 'Interpretation' box in the center. From 'Interpretation', an arrow labeled 'ALARM' points upwards to a vertical bar. This bar then branches out to three boxes on the right: 'Fight', 'Flight', and 'Freeze'. Arrows also point from 'Interpretation' to 'Reaction', which then points to each of the three outcome boxes.

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## Anxiety is Adaptive! Until it isn't...

- A healthy, normal and much needed response in the body
- An adaptive response
- Our belief systems drive the continued alarm response
- Becomes maladaptive when no obvious threat is present
- To change this, we need to go to the emotional core

Prepared by To The Moon and Back Psychological Services

## WHO IS THE CHILD?



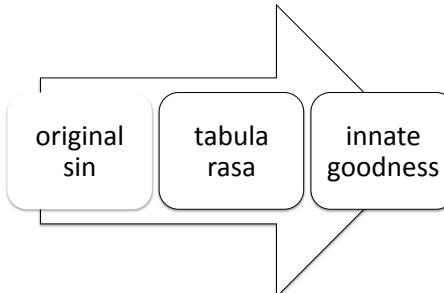
## Who is “The Child”?

- Who do we think children are?
- How do our ideas about who children are impact the way we interact with them?
- How do these interactions in turn affect how they experience us as really “knowing” them...really “getting them”?
- How does this impact how they develop and grow up?



## Who is “The Child”?

- Historical timeline:

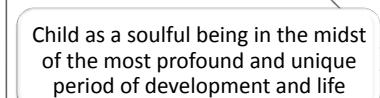


original sin      tabula rasa      innate goodness



## Who is “The Child”?

- Our assumptions about children really matter
- They trickle down and impact the minutia of our everyday
- Over the days, weeks, months, and years, these “droplets” add up to a lot!



Child as a soulful being in the midst  
of the most profound and unique  
period of development and life





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	<p>What does it mean to be held in another's mind? Why does it matter, and how does such a feeling develop? Everything that we know about [children] leads to the conclusion that they seek human <b>connection</b>, not only to survive but for its own sake. They are born looking for us. Given a choice of what to look at in their first hours, it is always the human face they choose.</p> <p><b>-Dr. Jeree Paul</b></p> <p><small>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright</small></p>	 <p><b>CONNECTION IS KEY</b></p> <p><small>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</small></p>
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	<p><b>Connection is key</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are a social species</li> <li>• Emotional connectedness allows us to thrive</li> <li>• It is not a <i>want</i>, but a <i>need</i></li> <li>• <b>Connection = regulation</b></li> <li>• <b>Disconnection = disregulation</b></li> </ul> <p><small>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</small></p>	 <p><b>Connectedness &amp; Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most significant “environment” of a developing human’s life</li> <li>• “Coherent interpersonal relationships produce coherent neural integration within the child that is at the root of adaptive self-regulation.” (Siegel, 2001, p. 86)</li> <li>• Positive relationships offer the best environment for optimal brain development (Davies, 2004)</li> </ul>
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## Anxiety in the beginning

- Anxiety has at its roots in a child who is struggling for control, typically when there is the experience of things around them feeling out of control
- This struggle kicks in neurologically and chemically as a stress response
- This stress response leads to distortions in thinking that make sense for the child in light of the feelings they are experiencing

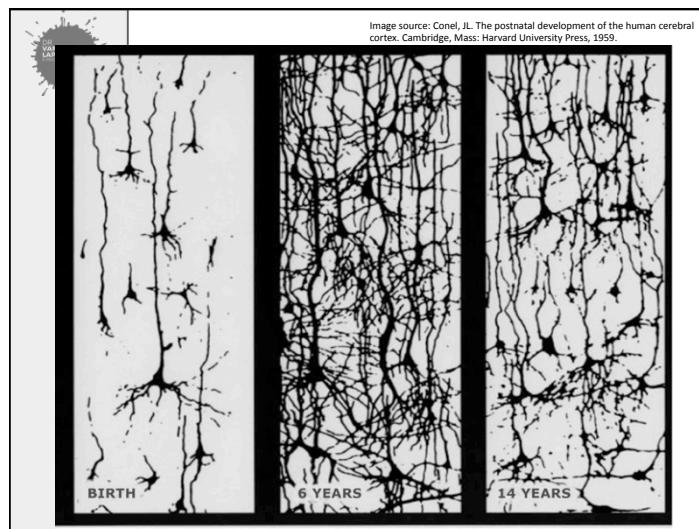
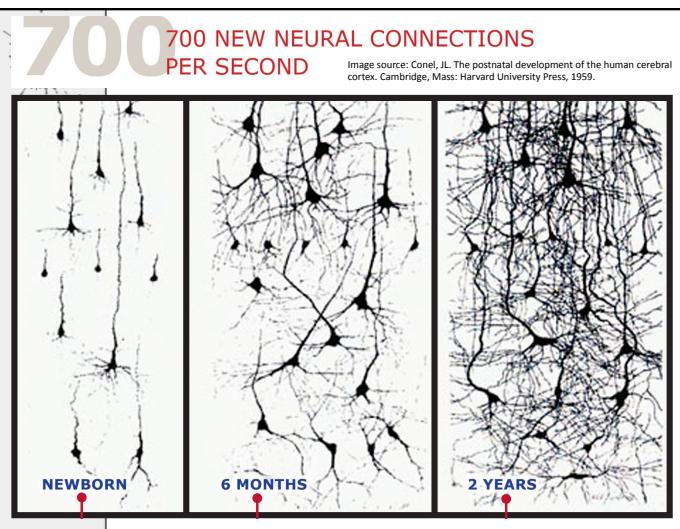
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## Connectedness & Development

- Attachment security is consistently related to levels of depression and anxiety
- This relationship intensifies from childhood to adolescence
  - Brimariu & Kerns, 2010 – review paper; Lee & Hanin, 2009
- A secure base leads to: Higher levels of positive mood; Better coping strategies; Increased regulation of emotion
  - i.e. less depression, less anxiety, less behavioral difficulties
  - (Kerns et al., 2007)
- This research not only highlights our need for etiologic reconsiderations, but also points us solidly in the direction of CONNECTION as we work towards supporting children with anxiety.

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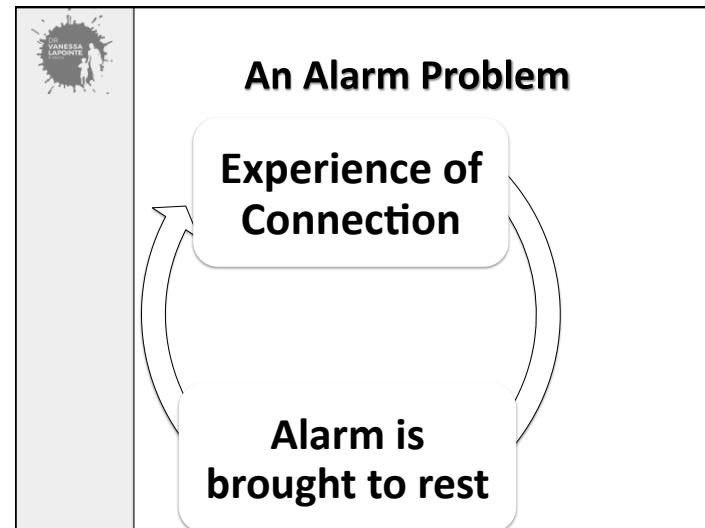
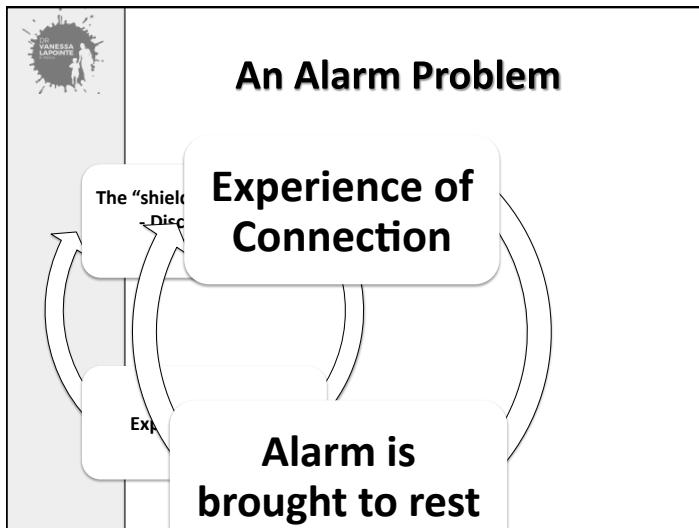
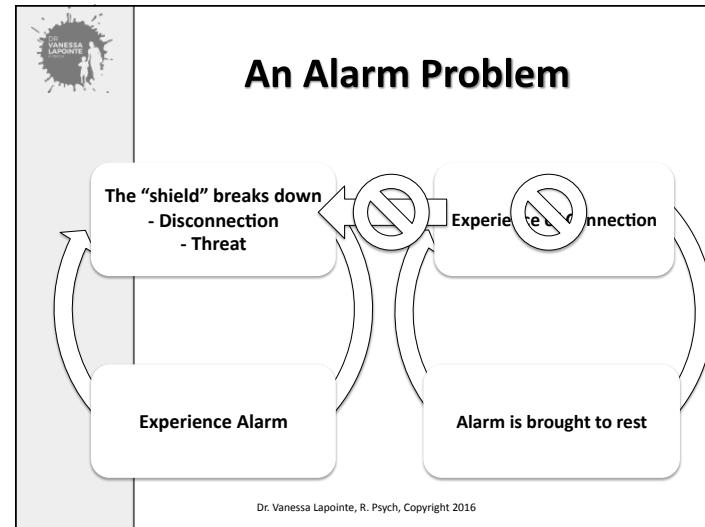




## The role of the “big people”

- Children view their “big people” as their ultimate protectors
- Without us, they are not able to survive in this world
- Their connection to us is vital to their development
  - Physically
  - Emotionally
- This connection is so important it has been given the name “attachment” in the research world

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**Lack of control = ALARM!**  
*Where does this come from?*

1. DISCONNECT  
– emotionally and/or physical

2. THREAT from the world around  
– “perceived” or actual

Reinterpreted as...

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**Bad Big People**  $\neq$  **Anxious child**  
necessarily

**“At rest” child**  $=$  **Attuned & Insightful Big People**

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**A NIGHT ON THE TOWN...**



**A night on the town...**

- What are some ways in which Barry is too assertive or imposing with Jean?
- If you were Barry, what are some signs from Jean that may lead you to alter your approach?
- What are some examples of how big people act with children that mirror Barry’s tactics with Jean? What assumptions are behind these actions?
- What are some examples of how we might interact with families/parents that mirror Barry’s tactics with Jean? What assumptions are behind these actions?



## **The Big Picture**

# **The Foundation of Effective Support**

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## **Debunking anxiety pop-culture**

1. We do not get better at dealing with worry by practicing dealing with worry – this simply leads to a build-up of worry.
2. Long-term consistency= real change; quick fix = fake change.
3. The process is never unidirectional – life happens!

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## **Guiding Principles**

### **What children need**

1. Connection security results in maturity
2. Big people need to ensure that little cups are overflowing
3. Big people must always be the answer to a little person's troubles – even if you have no idea what that answer is, the child must believe that you are the answer. Period.
  - "Children need us to be bigger, stronger, wiser AND kind" – Circle of Security
  - "Hulk it up"
4. Bottom line always comes down to connection

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## **The process of creating SAFETY**

1. Provide Shelter
  - Make the world be quiet
2. Fears to tears
  - Get it out!
3. Cultivate courage

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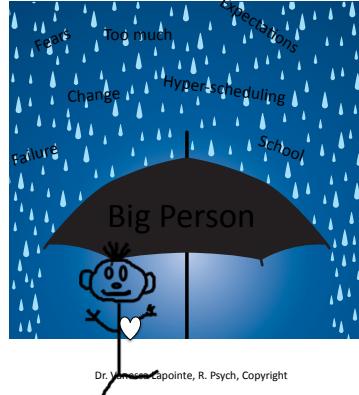


## 1. PROVIDE SHELTER

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## Provide Shelter from the Storm



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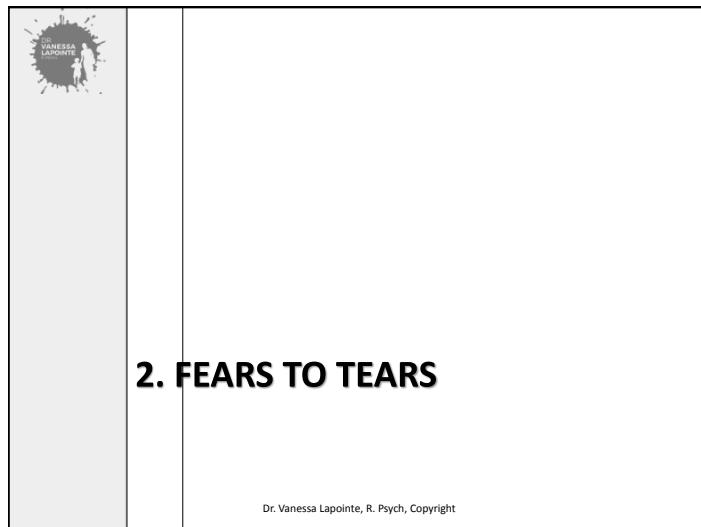
## Provide Shelter from the Storm

1. Provide the umbrella – reduce sources of anxiety
2. Provide a sense of protection from sources of anxiety
3. Get in front of anxiety – be omnipotent
4. Routine, consistency, calm
5. Nest
6. No matter what – an enduring theme
7. Do not test the connection

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2. FEARS TO TEARS

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## Fears to Tears

- Very fearful children will begin to numb-out so “provide shelter” is about bringing them out of that place
- Fears to tears is when we start to welcome back the full range of emotion in the child
- When the fears move to tears – you have succeeded! “It gets worse before it gets better.”
- To move from fears to tears, a child needs:
  1. Safety in expression
  2. Safety in acceptance
- It is the job of the big person to cultivate that safety
- Connectedness and relationship are the vehicle by which safety is ensured

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## Fears to Tears

1. Be the one they turn to – the one they know will be soft
2. Communicate the sense that you can handle the expression of the fear – no matter what
3. Absolutely ensure that the child feels heard
  - Actions speak louder than words
4. Find ways to provide relief from physical symptoms – in connection and not isolation
5. Move the non-verbal to the verbal – get them talking – move to safety and resolution using the narrative
6. Get them moving – physical activity provides a naturally sourced boost

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## 3. CULTIVATE COURAGE

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## Cultivate Courage

- Six-year-old client:
  - “Courage is feeling afraid but doing it anyway”
- You have to actually be able to feel afraid to be courageous – this is why we need “Shelter” and “Fears to Tears”
- When the stage has been set with relationship, and fears can now easily be converted to tears, courage can be cultivated
- For courage to be expressed, fear must be endured
- The child will need experiences of fear to find courage!

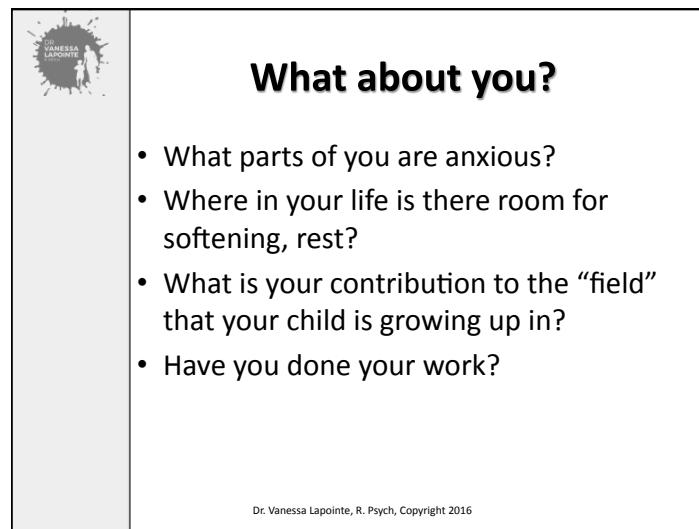
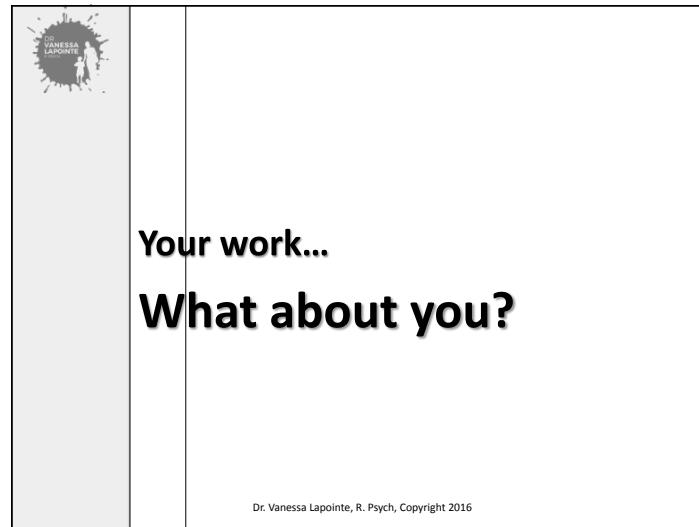
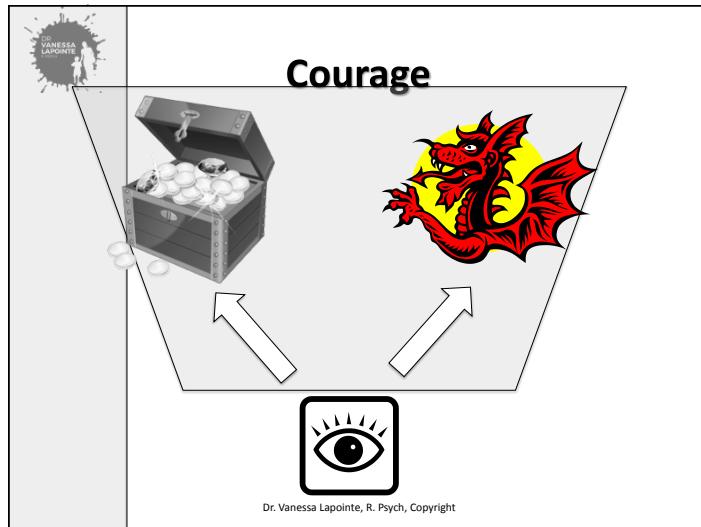
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## Cultivate Courage

1. Allow fear to be confronted
2. Start low and go slow
3. Provide repeated experiences
4. Provide a soft landing when courage is fleeting or outcomes are disappointing
5. Focus on BOTH the desired outcome and the lurking fear
6. Provide a safe haven for retreating to

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**What about you?**

“What is to the greatest good of self is to the greatest good of all.”

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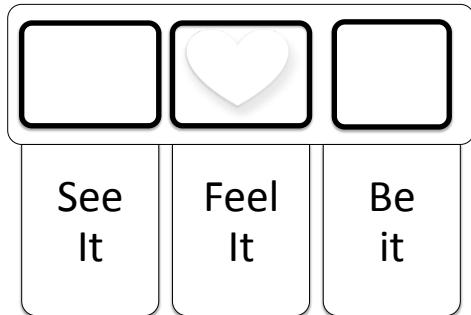
**Setting a child up for growth**

**A WORLD THAT MAKES SENSE**

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**“Being it”**



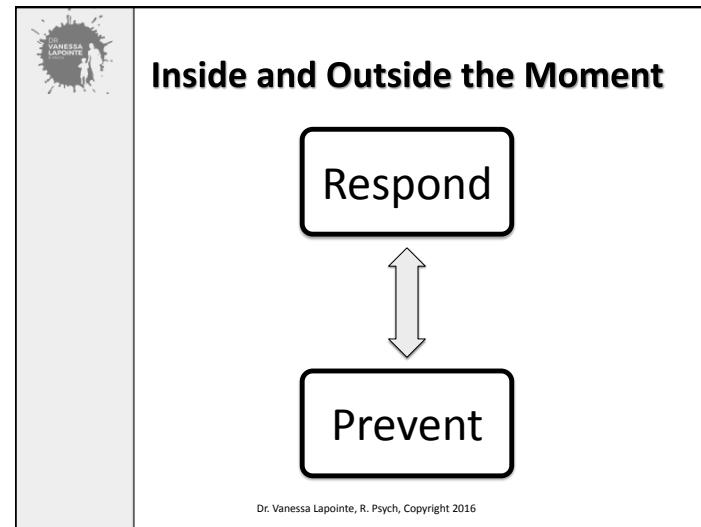
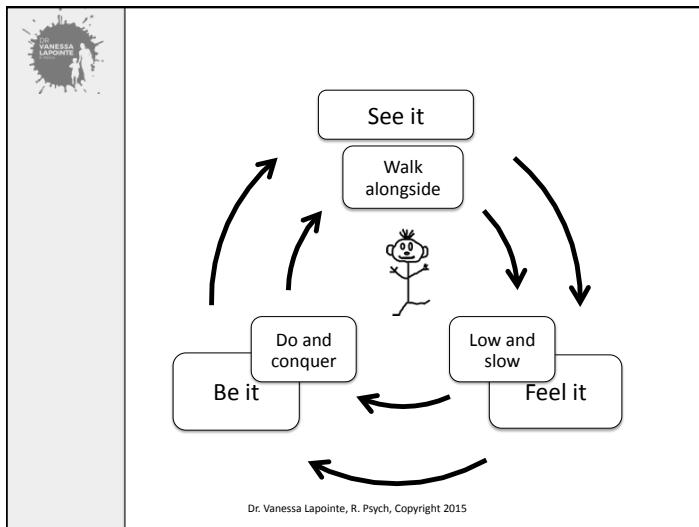
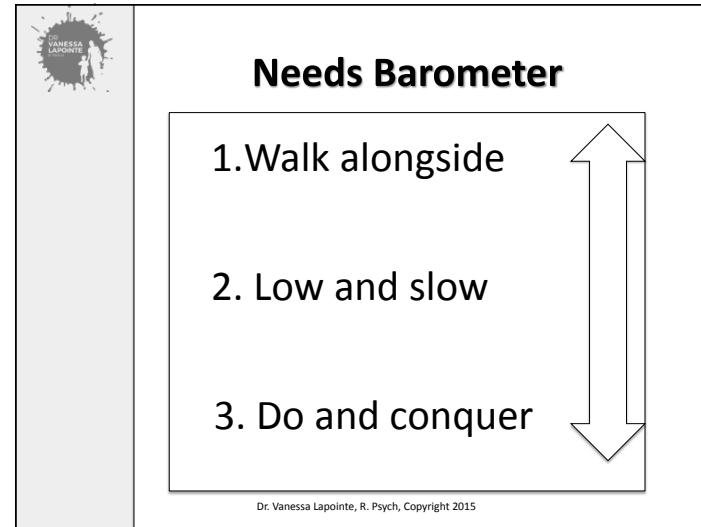
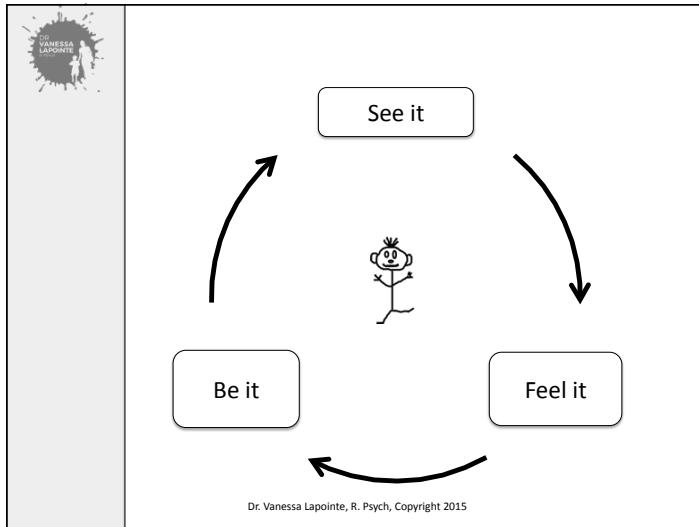
See It      Feel It      Be It

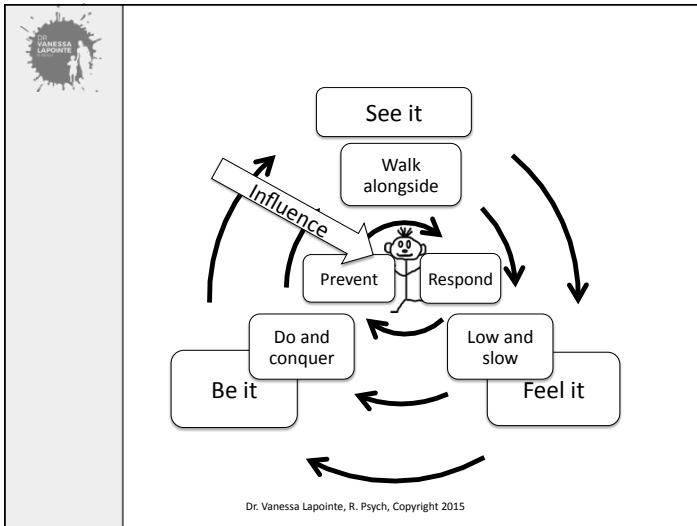
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**Si. Fi. Bi.**

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What would it be like to gauge the success of our efforts not based on our child's behaviour, but rather, on our own?

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## 4 Principles Everyday Tools for Managing Anxiety

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### How to roll...

1. Nurture connection
2. Be big
3. Create Containment
4. Connect to Relax

- The idea is that you need to provide some shelter
- You need to make emotions safe to feel and express
- And you need to find a way to help your child face their fears – and conquer!

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## PRINCIPLE 1. NURTURE CONNECTION

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## Principle 1. Nurture Connection

1. Connection security results in maturity
2. Come alongside a child to get her onside
3. Show love in a no-matter-what kind of way
4. Keep relationship as the bottom line
5. Fill 'em up
6. Pick up what they put down
7. Be generous
8. Play

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## Principle 1. Nurture Connection

1. Connection security results in maturity
  - Through the gift of deep dependence comes the reality of true independence
  - Be very direct about inviting your kids to depend on you
  - Look for opportunities to “do for them what they can and should do for themselves”
  - You are seeking to create an environment of acceptance and dependence
  - Dependence is good!

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## Principle 1. Nurture Connection

2. Come alongside to get them onside
  - It is human nature to resist influence outside of connection
  - Connection at relationship level but also moment by moment
  - Join with your child first
  - Issue directives, share ideas, and invite compliance with routines second

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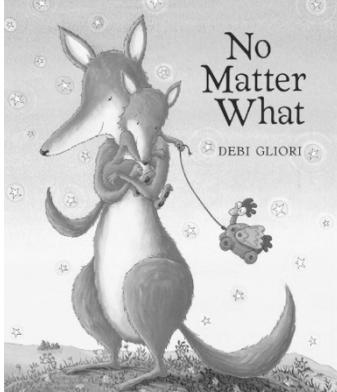
## Principle 1. Nurture Connection

3. Show love in a no-matter-what kind of way

- Anxiety absolutely impacts relationships
- But connection = regulation
- Make the connection bigger than the anxiety and all of the symptoms erupting from it
- No matter how big the mistake, the challenge, the explosion— have the child believe that the connection endures beyond everything
- Cast forward to the next point of connection
- Visually script
- Ideas:
  - Symbols to hold onto
  - A time of reconnection to look forward to
  - Talk about the parents to the child (at school, daycare)
  - Parent picture board
  - Use rituals
  - Bite out of sandwich
  - Etc.!!!!

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No  
Matter  
What  
DEBI GLIORI

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Invisible  
String  
Patrice Karst  
Illustrated by Geoff Stevenson

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## Principle 1. Nurture Connection

4. Keep relationship as the bottom line

- You want them to *feel* like the most important thing to you is the connection
- You are not here in the service of the world around you, but rather, in the service of the child who is utterly dependent upon you
- Do nothing in terms of responses that would interrupt this.

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	<h2>Principle 1. Nurture Connection</h2> <p>5. Fill 'em up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only when they have had their fill can they rest from seeking it</li> <li>• Give them more of you than you think they need</li> <li>• Have them feel your connection above and beyond</li> <li>• Start your day 15 minutes earlier to provide this</li> <li>• Make sure to be 100% present for greetings and invitations</li> <li>• End your day with connection and a casting forward to morning connection</li> <li>• Book under pillow; chat about visiting in dreamland; hearts sprinkled on bed; morning cups of warmth</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h2>Principle 1. Nurture Connection</h2> <p>6. Pick up what they put down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture a sense of trust</li> <li>• Have them know they can depend on you to act on their behalf in the best possible way</li> <li>• Respond swiftly and deftly</li> <li>• Be fierce about this – in a quiet, strong, confident, sure way without flaunting</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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	<h2>Principle 1. Nurture Connection</h2> <p>7. Be generous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What a wonderful gift!</li> <li>• Surprise the child with generosity</li> <li>• Act before they ask</li> <li>• Be stealth in your generous provision</li> <li>• Extra bedtime chapters; a favorite meal cooked without request; a little treat that magically appears</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h2>Principle 1. Nurture Connection</h2> <p>8. Play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play is an essential part of healthy existence (David Elkind)</li> <li>• You must play in order to grow – even as adults!</li> <li>• Aim for at least 15 minutes a day of uninterrupted playtime with your child</li> <li>• Seek the joy</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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## PRINCIPLE 2. BE BIG

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## Principle 2. Be Big

1. “Just know”...
2. Exit stage left
3. Steer into the skid
4. Be okay with upset
5. Exude confidence
6. Be the biggest
7. Provide hope in advance

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## Principle 2. Be Big

1. “Just know”...
  - Even if you don’t have the answer, you need to BE the answer
  - Have your children sense you as “all knowing” even if you don’t know

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## Principle 2. Be Big

2. Exit stage left
  - Get out of there when you need to!
  - But do so gracefully and without surrounding your “hulkness”
  - Never fear - you will have lots of other opportunities

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	<h2>Principle 2. Be Big</h2> <p>3. Steer into the skid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This allows a sense of you as being in control even in situations that actually are very much out of control</li><li>• You cannot control a child who cannot control themselves</li><li>• So call the shots on what you know is coming anyway</li></ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h2>Principle 2. Be Big</h2> <p>4. Be okay with upset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nobody ever said childhood was meant to be quiet and peaceful and pleasant all the time</li><li>• Chaos and upset are a lovely and essential part of the package!</li><li>• Welcome it</li><li>• Tears and upset are wonderful when safely received by the warm embrace of connection with a caring adult</li></ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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	<h2>Principle 2. Be Big</h2> <p>5. Exude confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You have got to walk it</li><li>• Your tone</li><li>• Your posture</li><li>• Your words</li><li>• Your eyes</li><li>• Have your sense of yourself as a “big person” come seeping out of how you <i>are</i> – drip, drop, drip, drop</li></ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h2>Principle 2. Be Big</h2> <p>6. Be the biggest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You be in charge of the connection</li><li>• You nurture it</li><li>• You mend it</li><li>• You apologize</li><li>• You care take</li><li>• You shield</li></ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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## Principle 2. Be Big

7. Provide hope in advance

- There is a sense of desperation that can set in when the “point of no return” is thought to have been passed
- Hope in advance rescues the child from having to go there

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## PRINCIPLE 3. CREATE CONTAINMENT

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## Principle 3. Create Containment

1. Get the shout out
2. Hand over the road map: using verbal or visual scripting
3. Establish rituals and traditions
4. Feel the rhythm of your schedule
5. Repeat subtle flags
6. Create a nest

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	<h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>1. Get the shout out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes this can just build up</li> <li>• And it gets stuck</li> <li>• Provide your child the relief of allow some of the pressure out of the system</li> <li>• But set this up to occur at a time and in a way that ultimately safeguards them from the judgmental, shaming gaze of the world</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>2. Hand over the road map: using verbal or visual scripting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell the whole story from beginning to end</li> <li>• Make it visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Visual schedule of week/month</li> <li>– Visual schedule of day</li> <li>– Visual schedule for tricky patches in the day e.g. leaving the house</li> <li>– Use social stories</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Remember what stresses kids out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Being rushed</li> <li>– Not knowing what is coming next</li> <li>– Transitions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Boardmaker</li> <li>– <a href="http://www.easysdays.com">www.easysdays.com</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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	 <p><b>In the Morning</b> Example uses Easy Daysies™ Every day Kit, Chores &amp; Rewards Kit</p> <p><b>After School</b> Example uses Easy Daysies™ Every day Kit, Extracurricular Activities Kit</p> <p><b>Easy Daysies™ Magnetic Fold &amp; Go</b> The Easy Daysies Magnetic Fold &amp; Go is foldable and portable. It hangs anywhere, so you don't need a magnetic fridge. Stack Easy Daysies Magnetic Fold &amp; Go down the middle, or use the left and right sides to track "To do" and "Done".</p> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2015</p>	 <p><b>Time Timer</b> Time Timer LLC</p> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright</p>
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	<h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>3. Establish rituals and traditions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of belonging and identity</li> <li>• Rituals are a way to bring special meaning and emotional safety into the daily goings-on of a child's world</li> <li>• We think of rituals and traditions for special occasions, but what about just for life?</li> <li>• E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What are Fridays all about?</li> <li>– What do you do to kick off the day each day?</li> <li>– What are your special goodbye rituals (give me an “h”!)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>4. Feel the rhythm of your schedule</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surprise and spontaneity are not generally well-received by most human beings!</li> <li>• Having a rhythm to your days and your life provides a sense of safety</li> <li>• Create a sense of rest in allowing for “givens”</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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	<h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>5. Repeat subtle flags</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have some go-to's that allow you to easily highlight necessary boundaries and expectations</li> <li>• “kindness and respect”</li> <li>• “Caring words”</li> <li>• “Gentle hands”</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>	 <h3>Principle 3. Create Containment</h3> <p>6. Create a nest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes you have to take cover</li> <li>• Put up a big shield</li> <li>• Climb into the nest and stay there for as long as is required for the “system” to settle</li> </ul> <p>Dr. Vanessa Lapointe, R. Psych, Copyright 2016</p>
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## PRINCIPLE 4. CONNECT TO RELAX

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## Principle 4. Connect to Relax

1. Embrace opportunities to help children with the physical process of “settling”:
  - Form a relationship with their feelings
  - Reduce physical symptoms of agitation
  - Feel calmed in the *nurturing presence* of one of their big people
2. Deep breathing
3. Relaxation scripts
4. Progressive muscle relaxation
5. Calming boards

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## Principle 4. Connect to Relax

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## Principle 4. Connect to Relax

2. Deep breathing
  - Circular breathing
  - In through nose and out through mouth
  - Belly breathing; birthday candles; balloon blowing; etc.
  - Snuggled up next to a special big person!

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### Principle 4. Connect to Relax

3. Relaxation scripts

- Guided meditation
- Simple stories that allow a “pause” button to be pushed
- App store – Bedtime Meditations by Christiane Kerr

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### Principle 4. Connect to Relax

4. Progressive muscle relaxation

- The various muscle groups in the body are progressively tensed and released following a script
- [www.sickkids.ca/pdfs/IMP/21461-52IMPReprint-Corniere.pdf](http://www.sickkids.ca/pdfs/IMP/21461-52IMPReprint-Corniere.pdf)
- Check app store
- Taming Worry Dragons has a script imbedded in the workbook

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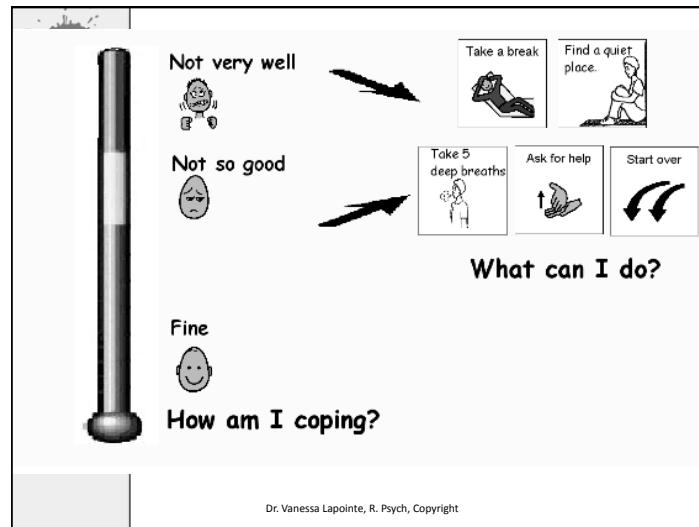


### Principle 4. Connect to Relax

5. Calming boards

- Visual scripting of what it takes to calm our bodies
- [www.setbc.org](http://www.setbc.org) for calming boards (visual scripts)

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Not very well

Not so good

Fine

How am I coping?

Take a break

Find a quiet place

Take 5 deep breaths

Ask for help

Start over

What can I do?

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I'm feeling anxious.  
I need to calm down.  
What do I do?

I can take a deep breath.

I can count to five.

I can go to a quiet place.

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## Call upon your village

- You were never meant to go this alone
- Our brains are designed to marinate in connection
- Find ways to create a sense of community all around your children

## IN SUMMARY...

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## In Summary...

- A soft, nurturing response is always the answer
- Connection is at the heart of creating the right conditions for allowing a child to change their fears to tears, and find their courage.

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## The bottom line...

**"When a child is held in mind, the child feels it, and knows it. There is a sense of safety, of containment, and most important, existence in that other, which is vital. ... It seems to me that one of life's greatest privileges is just that - the experience of being held in someone's mind."**

**-Dr. Jeree Paul**

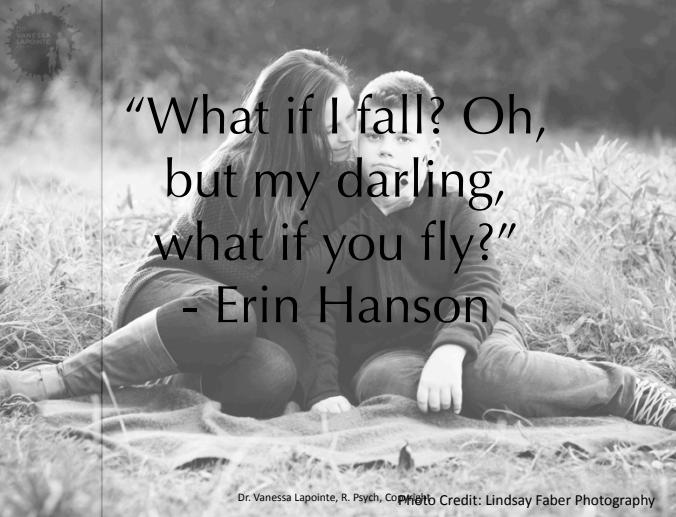
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## The bottom line...

- **It only takes one!**
- Be that one...

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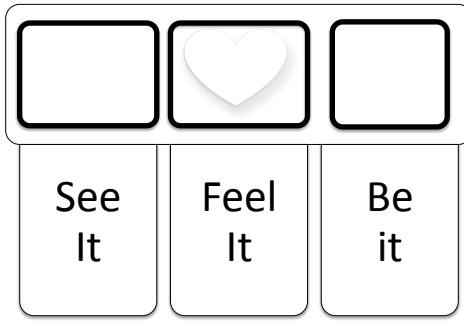
**"What if I fall? Oh, but my darling, what if you fly?"**

**- Erin Hanson**

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## **"Being it"**



See It      Feel It      Be It

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DR. VANESSA LAPOINTE

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