

The impact of student stress and anxiety on progress is increasingly being identified as a national problem in education. This workshop examines exactly why students can find it difficult to cope with academic stress, and explores easy-to-apply teacher and student based solutions designed to build resilience and help students to positively face challenge. Additionally, we will examine a brief over-view of practical teaching and learning activities, that can be applied to any classroom situation, that are designed to build student academic resilience and raise student self-confidence in the progress that they are making.



The Mental Health Friendly Classroom

What is normal adolescent anxiety?

TRIGGER

- Preparing for an exam
- Oral presentation
- Knowing they are in 'trouble'
- Moving home
- Starting a new school
- Friendship difficulties

Behaviour

Sweating
Nausea
Nervousness
Trembling
Apprehension
Heart racing
Restlessness
Concentration

Impact

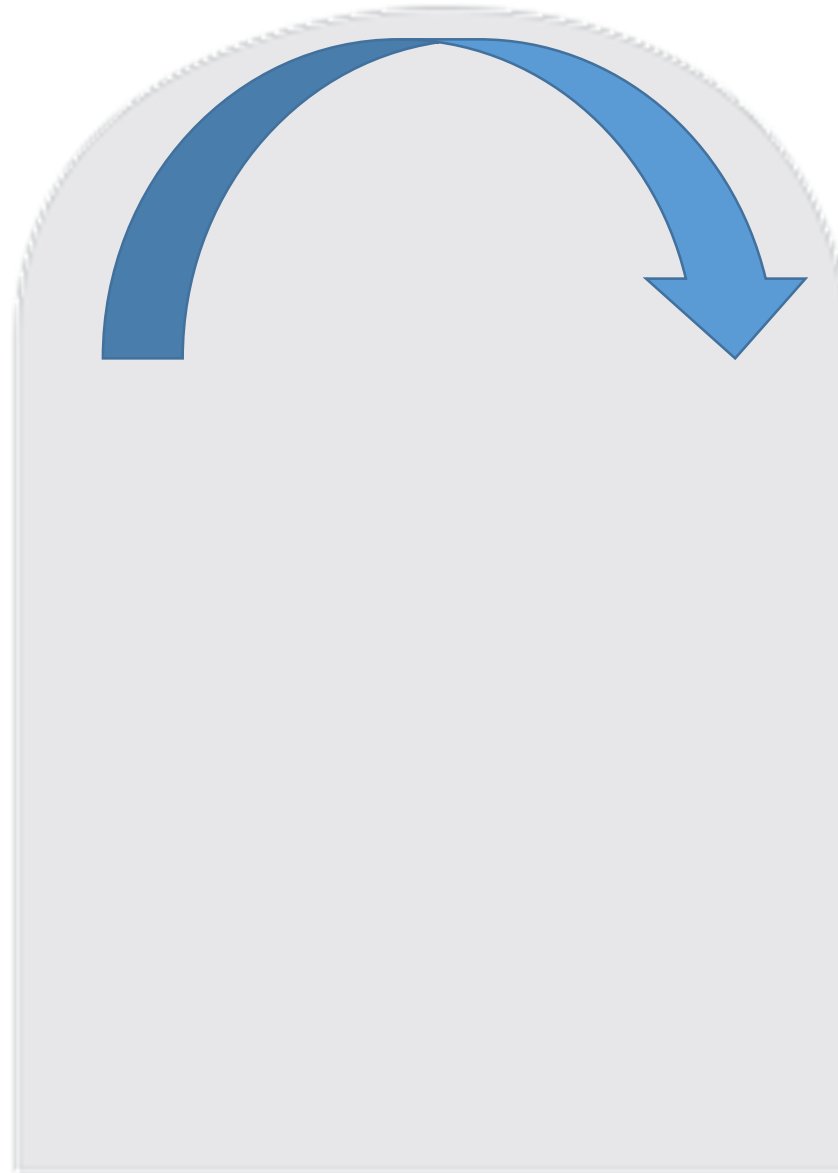
Transient
No major interference
Not as bad as they thought
Builds confidence
Prepares

Full use of skills.

Challenging performance demands.

Greater involvement.

Boredom.



Overloading.

Anxiety.

Poor concentration.

Difficulty making decisions.

Confusion.

Panic.

Fatigue.

Exhaustion.

Burn out.

Key point number 1:

Is the child displaying 'normal' anxiety? If so, it is essential to 'normalise' their response to it.

Dopamine, the neurotransmitter most responsible for feelings of pleasure, has a powerful impact. The early adolescent brain, with its increased number of nerve cells, has higher levels of dopamine circulating in the prefrontal cortex, but dopamine levels in the reward centre of the brain are changing throughout adolescence. These changes in the dopamine levels in the reward centre suggest that the adolescent requires more excitement and stimulation to achieve the same level of pleasure as an adult.

BBC





When is Anxiety a Disorder?

- Most children, adolescents and adults use anxiety to help them make good decisions
- Anxiety becomes a problem when it makes the decisions for you, interferes with your life and/or causes distress.
- Two forms: misinterpreting threat or extreme response



Key point number 2:

Allow the discussion and decision making process to take place.




Thinking

- Anxious children and teens have unrealistic or extreme thoughts that centre around harm or threat.
 - “My mom is late, she’s been in a car accident.”
 - “I can’t do this presentation because my classmates will think I’m dumb and laugh at me.”
 - “I will get sick in school and throw up, and everyone will know.”
 - “I will get in trouble if my work is not perfect.”



Thinking Errors

- Anxious children **overestimate** how likely it is that an unpleasant event will happen.
- They **overestimate** how bad the consequences will be if the event does happen.
- They **underestimate** their ability to cope with the anxiety and the unpleasant event



Doing- Anxious Behaviours

- **Pace, fidget, cry, cling, shake**
- **Avoid**
 - Refusing to go to school or class
 - Refusing to go somewhere alone
 - Complain of headache or stomach ache to get out of doing something
- **Reassurance seeking.**
 - “Am I going to die?”
 - “Are you sure _____ won’t happen?”
- **Repetitive behaviours to prevent event**

Key point number 3:

Avoidance is never the best option.

Participation must be used to challenge thinking errors.

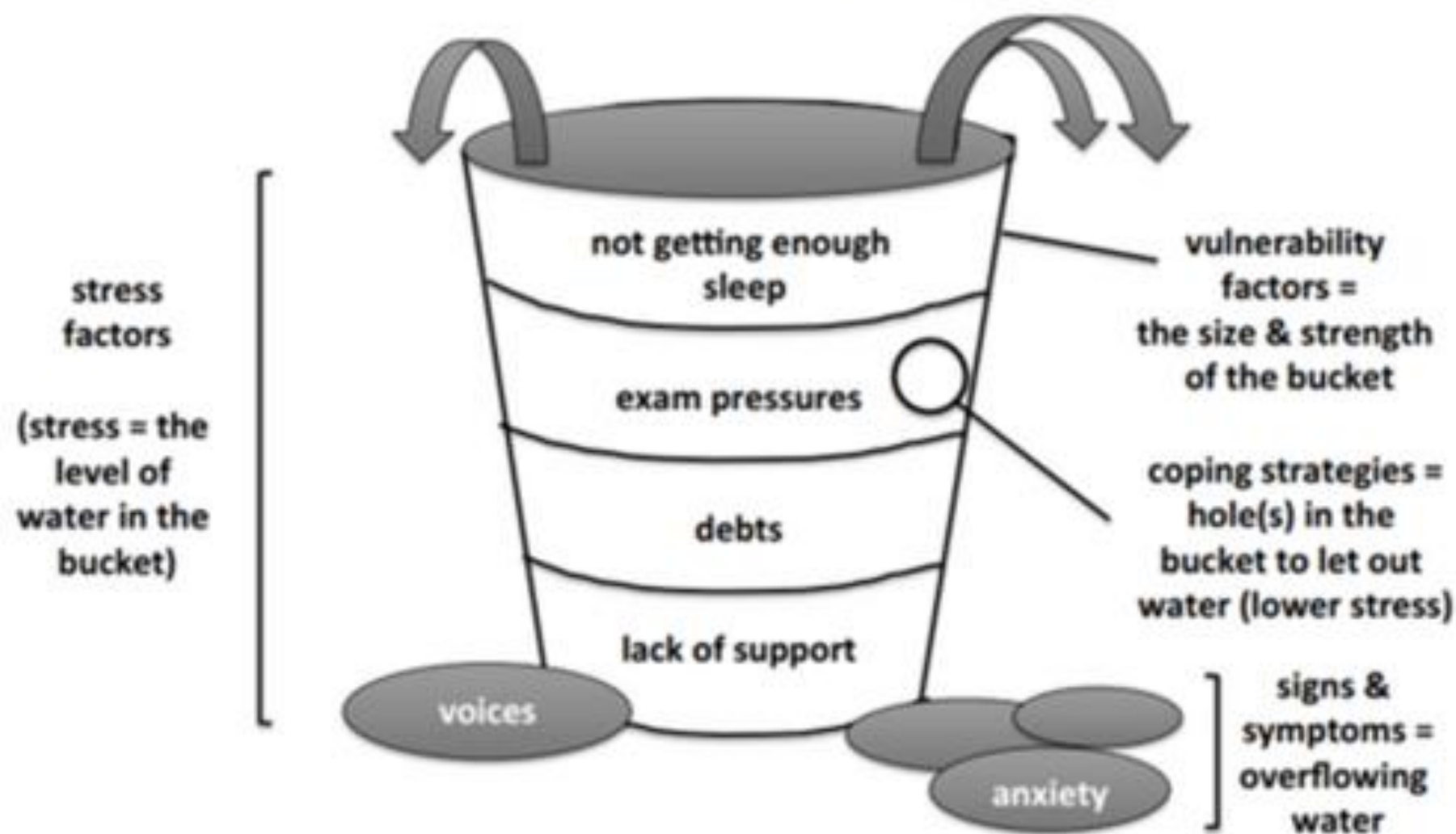
Avoidance is never the best option, although there may be times when it is the only option!

Prevent Avoidance

- By avoiding feared situations, or seeking reassurance, children learn they are not able to cope with the situation or their worry
- Model being brave and problem solving
- Encourage them to take little steps toward accomplishing the feared task
 - Take the bus to school 2 days a week.
 - Oral presentation alone with teacher
 - Go to first class
- Safe place to go in school when anxious
- **Reward effort!**

using an analogy: the stress bucket

(based upon: Brabban & Turkington 2002)





Key point number 4:

Use your Stress Buckets!



Anxiety British Columbia