


Making Sense of Anxiety




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Based on the work for Dr. Gordon Neufeld


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What is anxiety?



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How does the alarm system work?



physiology

chemistry

perceptions

feelings

impulses

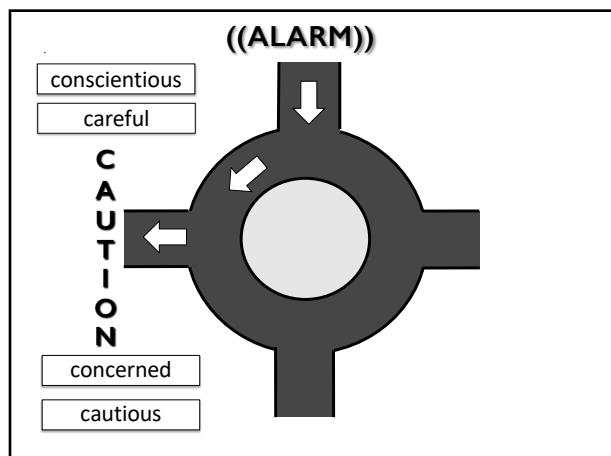
emotion

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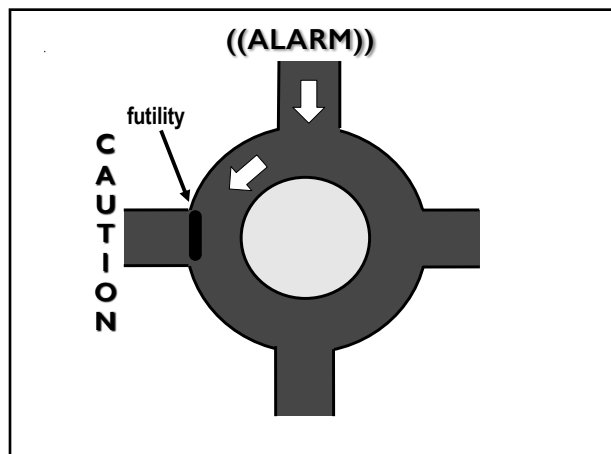
What is the alarm system?

- is mediated by the LIMBIC SYSTEM with the amygdala registering the threat and the hypothalamus orchestrating the response
- the autonomic nervous system is involved through the SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM
- the AROUSAL and ATTENTION systems are highly involved with alarm given high priority
- the fetus has a working alarm system by 6 months old.

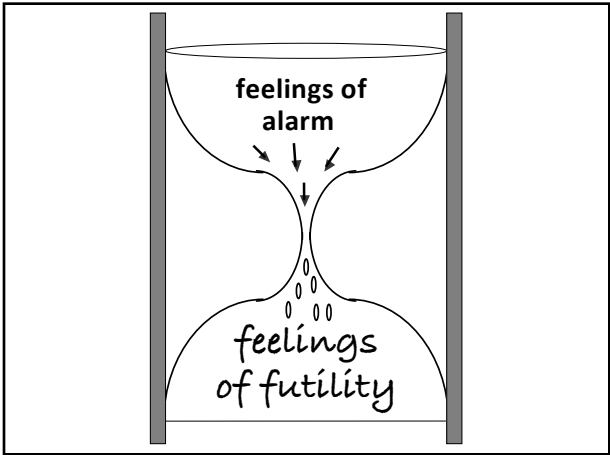
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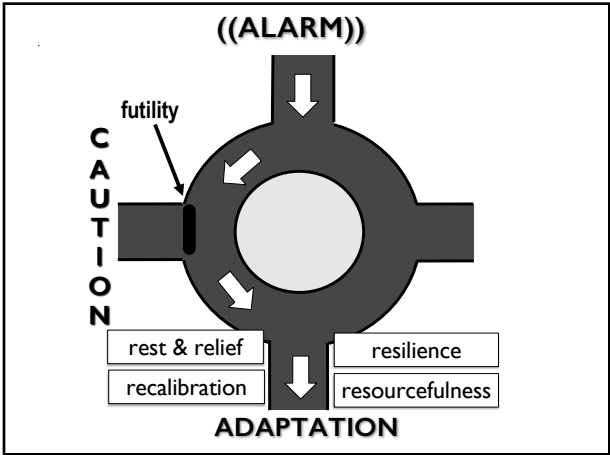
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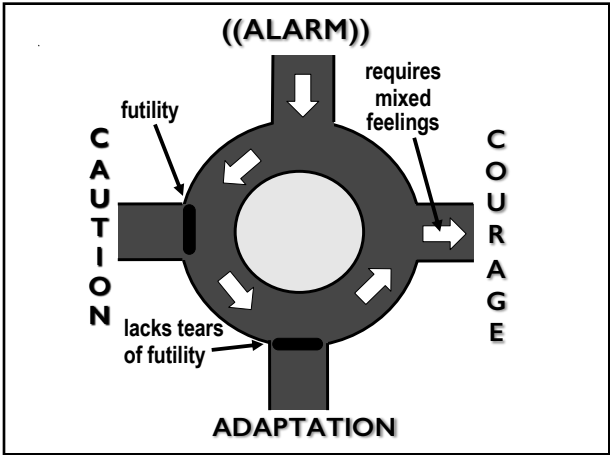
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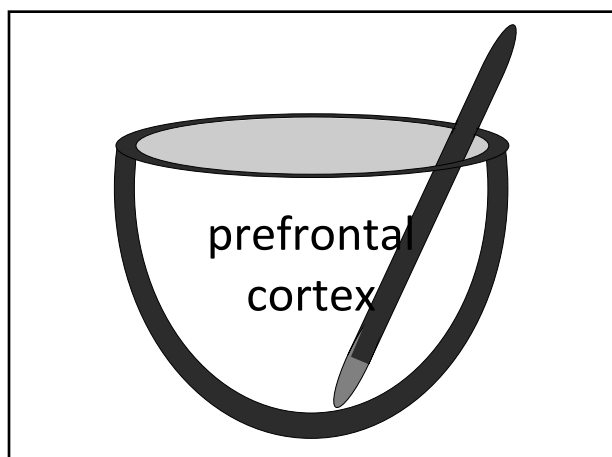
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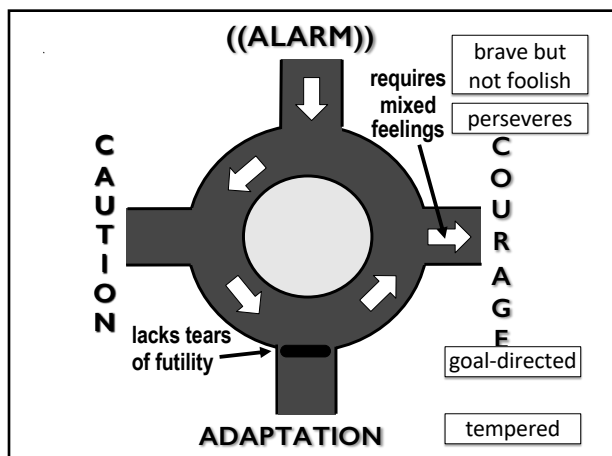
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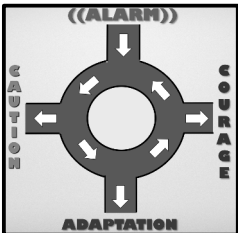
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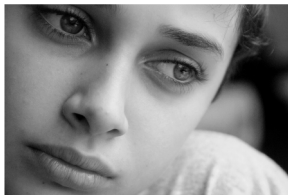
Feeling **ALARMED** should move us...

- To **CAUTION** if that is possible
- To **CRY** or **FEEL SADNESS** for what is futile
- To find our **COURAGE** if what alarms in our way



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What is so alarming?



For human beings,
the greatest source of alarm
is from **separation**

Physical, emotional, psychological separation

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Attachment

*... the most preeminent need of all
human beings*

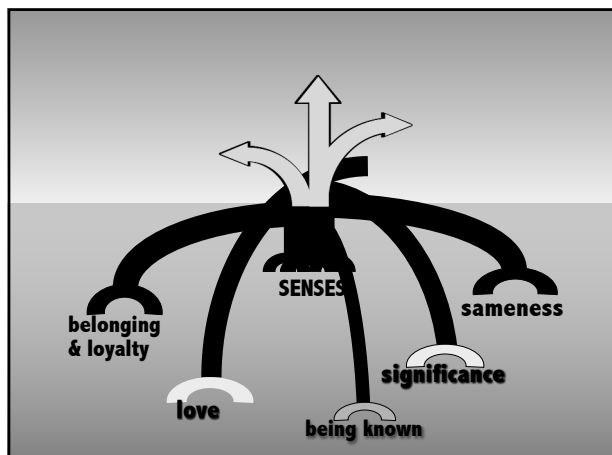


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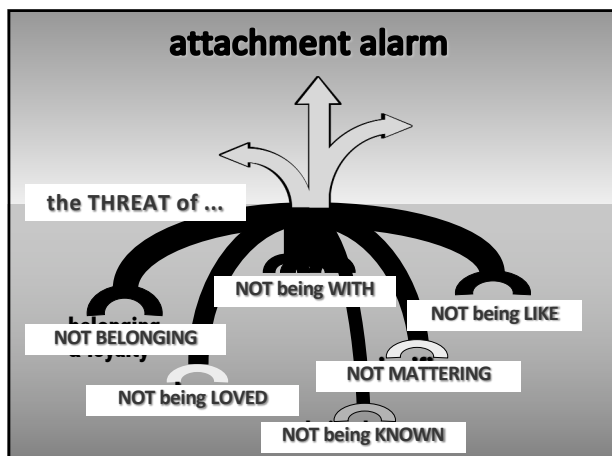
Harlow's experiments on attachment



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Typical experiences of separation

- Birth, bedtime, arrival of a sibling, moving
- Parents working, going to school, daycare, camp, shuffling between parents
- Facing death, realizing the inevitability of death, the realization that bad things can happen to those attached to
- Experiences of adoption and divorce
- Sensory overload
- Attachment separation: not being chosen, wanted, liked, recognized, significant, valued by those they are attached to

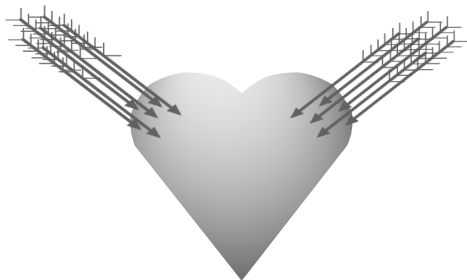
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Some **hidden** faces of separation

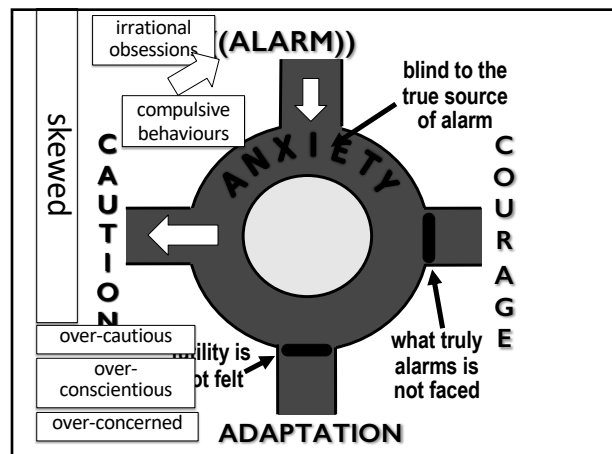
- feeling overwhelmed by emotion
- becoming a separate being
- feeling responsible for parent's feelings or actions or the proximity with parents
- possessing a secret that could divide
- undeveloped attachment, ie, unable to hold on when apart
- success
- the dawning realization that parents cannot keep one safe or that bad things can happen to them
- feeling like too much to handle / fear of not measuring up
- normal development at puberty
- peer orientation

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Facing separation is a very **vulnerable** experience.



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Typical signs of elevated anxiety

- unrelenting sense that something is wrong or that something bad is going to happen
- persistent feelings of nervousness or tension, lack of safety
- dreams reflect the emotional theme of alarm (eg, nightmares)
- motor energy of alarm may find release through nervous tics and muscle spasms
- periodic waves of unexplained panic

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ADDRESSING ANXIETY

*6 **surprising** solutions to a growing problem*



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Solution #1

*Reduce the separation
the students might be facing*



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Reduce Separation

REDUCE experiences where child faces separation

REFRAIN from separation-based disciplines

BRIDGE any separation that cannot be avoided

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Bridge what could divide



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Solution #2

*Provide a sense of **REST** and **SAFETY**.*



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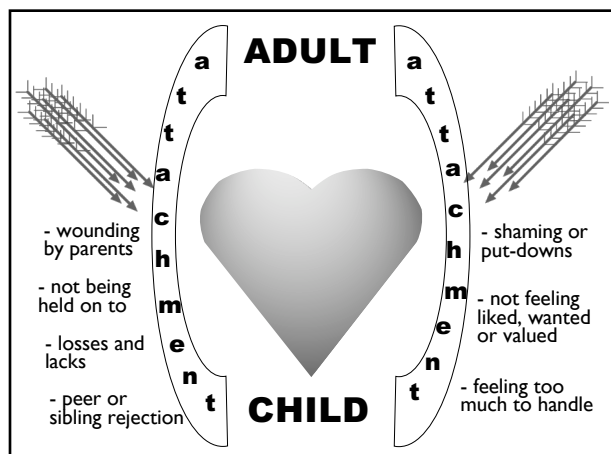
Provide REST and SAFETY

ASSUME the ALPHA ROLES in a child's life

SHIELD from wounding by others

DON'T overwork the alarm system

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DON'T overwork the alarm system

REFRAIN

- ... from raising one's voice
- ... from warnings, threats and ultimatums
- ... from upping the ante

COMPENSATE

- ... by 'scripting' cautious behaviour
- ... by using simple rules, procedures and protocols
- ... by keeping the child out of harm's way

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Solution #3

Foster an **accepting attitude** toward anxiety.



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Accept Anxiety

DON'T MAKE anxiety an alarming experience

DON'T BATTLE symptoms or irrationality

NORMALIZE and depersonalize the experience

ANTICIPATE and make room for the experience

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Solution #4

Bring the alarmed student to **rest** and
build resilience
by giving room for sadness and disappointment
when appropriate.



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HOW TO TOUCH **BRUISES** SAFELY

- Leave time between the experience and 'touching it'
- Be quick
- Start with the little bruises, not the gaping wounds

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Use Creative expression for feelings to come out

- art
- writing
- music making
- movement
- play



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Precipitate some sadness through:

- movies
- stories
- books
- puppet plays



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Solution # 5

Cultivate **courage** by helping to find **mixed feelings**.



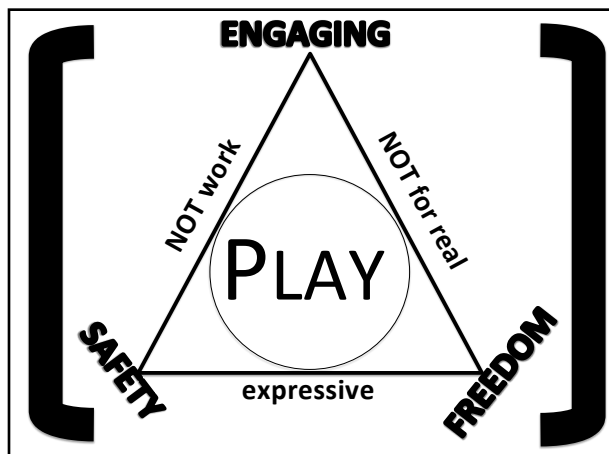
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Solution #6

Help find acceptable ways to reduce anxiety.



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How to Resource Yourself

- Physical Activity ; Dancing, walking, ANYTHING that makes your body move. Increasing your heart rate increases brain chemistry.
- Sleep
- Positive Social Interaction. We are a social tribe.
- Find time to be in nature
- Breathe (Andrew Weil 7:4:8)
- Play and Laugh
- Cry
- Creative Expression

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