Pavilion
EVENTS

Managing Stress and Distre

How to Help, Understand and Sup Children and Young People

Free webinar

Weds 12 June, 10.30am BST

Managing Stress and Distress

Stress and the Brain

Distress and Attachment

Managing Distress

Stress Reduction

Our brains have evolved in such a way as to ensure our survival. And they do this by constantly being on the alert for threats. This is the function of the part of our brain we call the Amygdala – spotting a threat and sending a message to another part of our brain – the Brain stem - to do something about it. The Brain Stem then triggers what we call a stress response or reaction.

So Stress has a survival function

- **It can energise us and keep us alert**

- **It enables awareness of our environment and helps us adapt to it**

- **The absence of stress would not only be impossible**

- it would be harmful

- **Without the capacity for a stress response we would be defenceless in the event of threats**

But

- **What may have been an adaptive life saving function for our ancestors can easily become a maladaptive response today - with negative consequences for our behaviour (distress) and our emotional and physical health!**

Stress and the Brain

- **The brain is responsible for everything we do or say – everything we think or feel and how we behave**
- **It deals with how we experience stress and how we deal with stressors.**

  We only need to think about 3 parts

- **The Amygdala**
- **The Hippocampus**
- **The Brain Stem**

The Amygdala

- The Amygdala is involved in receiving stimuli from other parts of the brain and sending out signals relating to threat – it engages primary emotions like fear, anxiety and anger

- The Amygdala controls the Stress Response System – it is the switch for Flight, Fight, Freeze

- It is located in the limbic system next to the Hippocampus and both are highly susceptible to stress

The Hippocampus

- The hippocampus is the seat of memory and therefore learning
- It switches on with every experience and is responsible for processing, encoding and retrieving everything that enters the brain
- It is highly susceptible to stress – which negatively affects processing and encoding

The Brain Stem is responsible for "mediating basic elements of energy flow" – in other words it controls our states of arousal and alertness

The brain stem also controls the physiological state of the body – our temperature, our breathing and our heart rate

- So the Brain Stem is responsible for our survival capacity – Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) and the Stress Response System (SRS) which activates -

- Fight – the Anger response

- Flight – the Fear/Anxiety response

- Freeze – a more extreme Panic response

The Autonomic Nervous System

- As part of its "survival maintaining" function, the ANS is responsible for activating and de-activating our stress response system.

- It triggers our fight/flight response when needed and then restores the state of bodily and emotional equilibrium when the crisis is over

- It has 2 branches – The "sympathetic" nervous system and the "parasympathetic" nervous system

The Sympathetic Nervous System

- It takes charge when the body needs an energetic reaction to a perceived threat.
- It is described as excitatory – often called the "accelerator" because it enables aroused bodily(physical) and emotional(psychological) states.
- It generates the energy for the Escalation phase and the Crisis stage of the Arousal Cycle

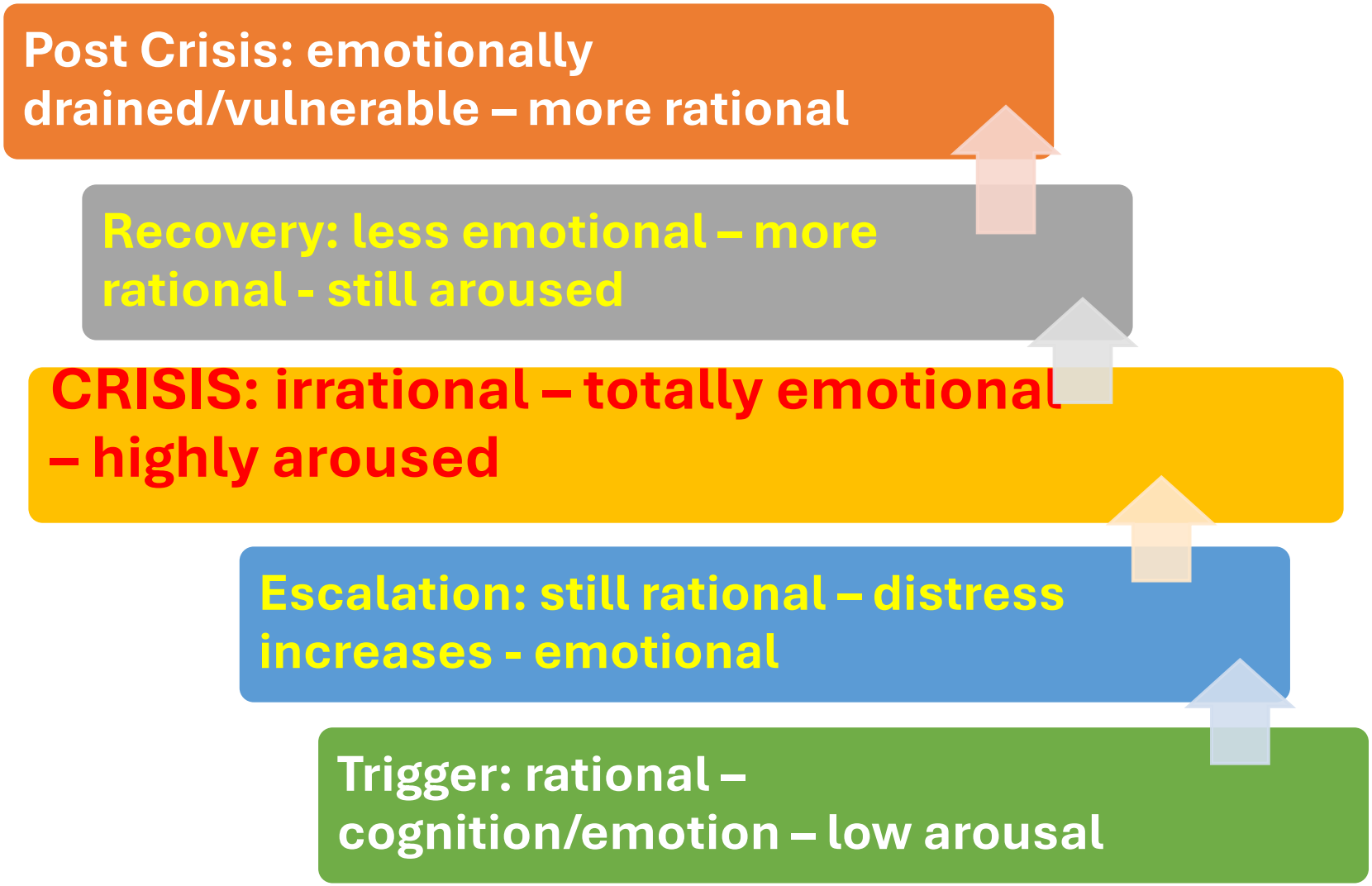
The Parasympathetic Nervous System

- **Its job is to enable de-arousal(physically and psychologically) – slowing our heart rate, normalizing breathing and helping us achieve a semblance of rationality.**

- **It brings us back to a state of equilibrium and relaxation and enables the rebuilding of energy.**

- **It is described as inhibitory – the "brake" - and it is the "driver" of the Recovery and Post Crisis stages of the Arousal Cycle**

Distress – The Arousal Cycle



Attachment and Distress

- **Attachment is not just another word to describe relationships – it is a behavioural system organised around a primary drive – *survival***

- **It a developmental theory which provides an understanding of how we organise our *thinking*, our *feelings* and our *behaviour* in response to threats (real or perceived)**

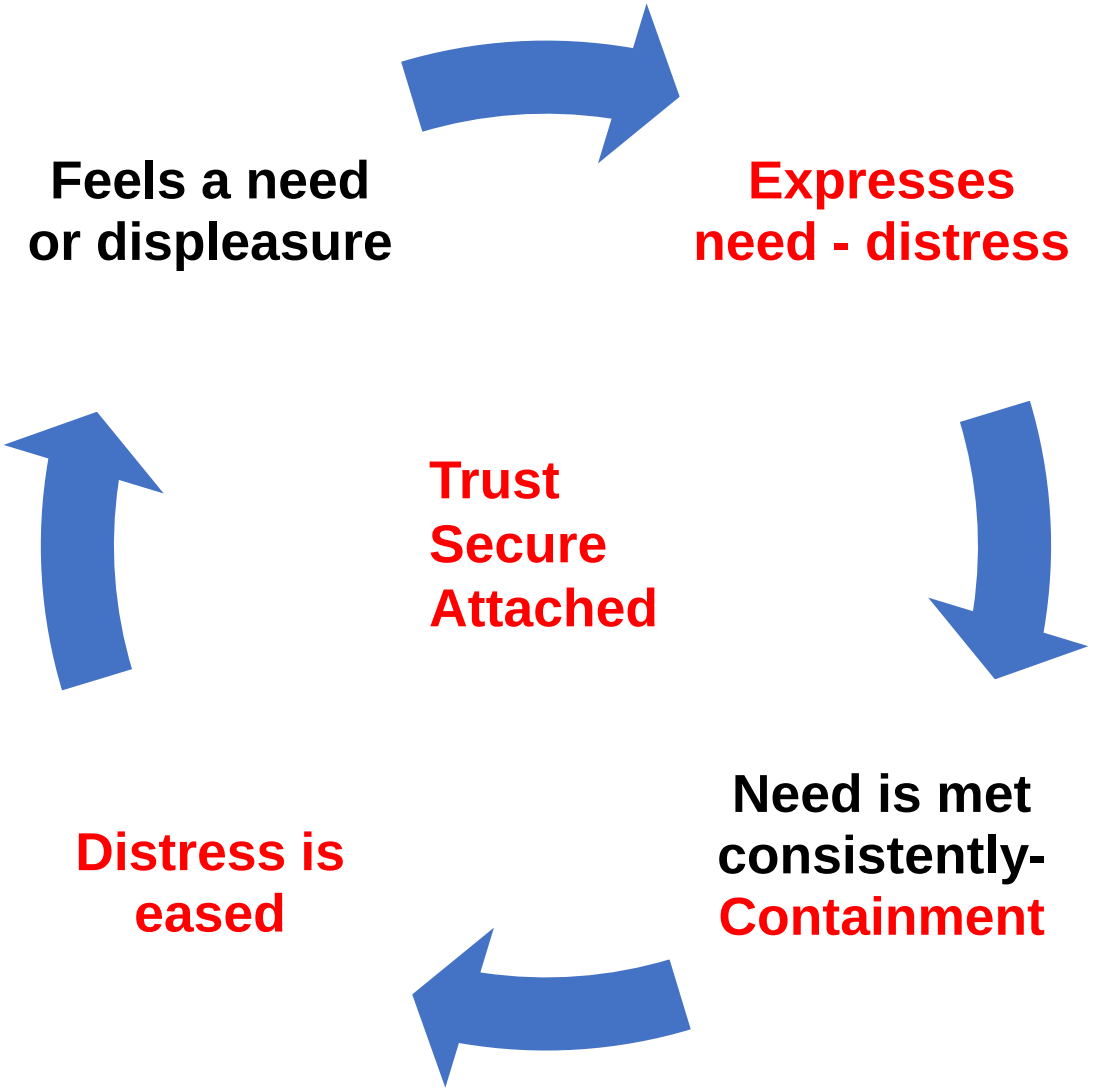
Attachment and Distress – survival again

- If a baby senses a threat, its only available strategy is to exhibit distress - to gain proximity and safety

- "Something is wrong/I don't know what to do"
- "I need help and I need it NOW!"

- And so Distress primarily has a communicative function

Arousal/Response Cycle - Containment



Internal Working Model

- When the primary caregiver meets the infant's needs in a caring, sensitive, warm and accepting manner and, is consistently available and accessible, relaxation and de-arousal become part of the child's experience – a moderated SRS

- This process enables the development of a positive internal working model – the child's sense of self and others

Internal working model

The early emotional and social experiences that we have help us to construct an internal working model of relationships that affects the way we relate to the external world.

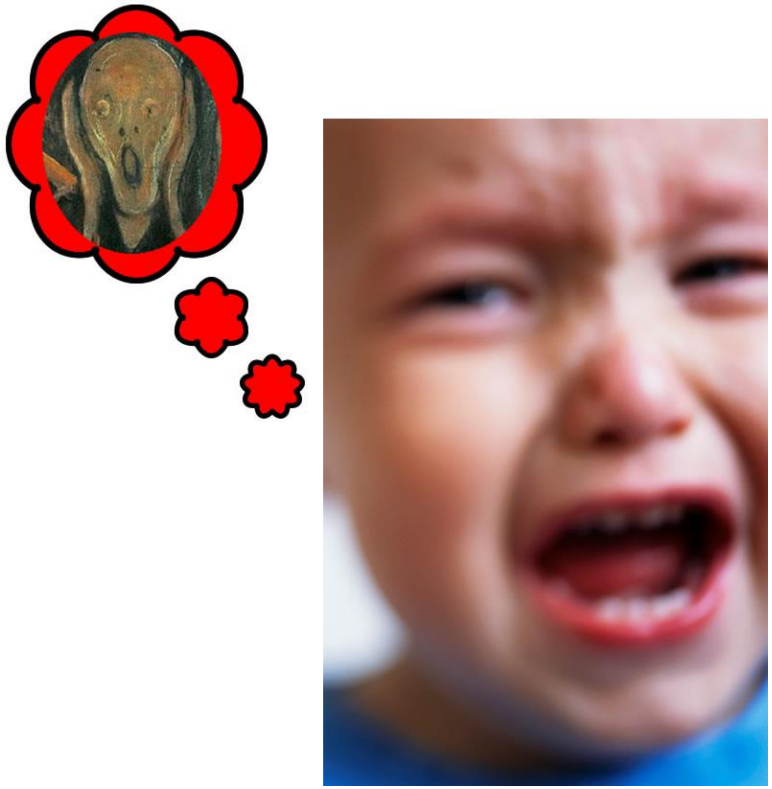
"I am loveable."

"Relationships are positive."

"I trust my world and the people in it."

"I am Resilient"

Internal working model



Not all children will carry positive internal models in their minds and consequently may view the world as a hostile and threatening place.

"I'm not loveable"

"I don't trust anyone"

"I'm anxious about relationships"

"I exhibit distress"

Distress can be managed

- The need for safety, security and protection
- A responsive, accessible adult (remember attachment)
- A calming approach de-escalation strategies
- The communicative function – listen, take seriously
- Acknowledge and legitimise emotions
- Offer solutions/choices
- Negotiation and compromise
- The Arousal Cycle and strategies for each stage

Stress and Stress Reduction

- Stress can be induced either externally from the environment or internally from thoughts or memory
- External triggers can be perceived as threats in words, sounds, actions or movements – even eye contact
- Internal triggers – a thought relating to an early memory or associated trauma – Implicit vs Explicit memory

- As we know our brain stem is responsible for triggering survival reactions - **fight, flight or freeze**. These physiological and psychological changes are brought about by the production of **stress chemicals**.

- The three stress chemicals are **noradrenaline, adrenaline and cortisol**.

Noradrenaline works on our brain - it is a neurotransmitter and helps our brain function **more effectively**.

Adrenaline impacts more on our bodies – it combines with oxygen in our bloodstream to prepare us physically for either **a fight or flight response**.

Cortisol is the most powerful of these hormones and it impacts **negatively** on both our **brain and our bodies – the freeze chemical.**

Impact of Stress – Cortisol

- On our ability to regulate moods and emotional states
- On our impulse control capability
- On our ability to empathise
- On cognitive flexibility/memory and therefore – on our ability to concentrate and learn
- On our patterns of sleep/dreams
- On our immune system – the body's response to infection and its ability to repair cell damage

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction

- **Past – *Present* – Future**
- **We spend more time agonising about the past or worrying about the future than focusing on and *fully functioning* in the present**
- **Children are easily distracted by thoughts about past and future – these affect concentration and often result in Stress Reactions - Mindlessness as opposed to Mindfulness**

Mindfulness (MBSR)

- **Essentially, mindfulness is the ability to rest the mind *"in the moment",* whether focused on a specific object or image (meditation) or on a task (an exercise or a movement). We can create a sense of relaxation through concentration – emotional stillness rather than arousal or distraction.**

- **When children play, they focus totally on the activity they are engaged in – they are completely engaged in the moment and on their game/task**

Mindfulness – how can it help?

- Stress reduction
- Self-regulation of emotional states
- Aid to concentration
- Aid to memory and learning
- Development of empathy and resilience
- Relaxation and sleep patterns

Helps us to produce helpful chemicals

- **Acetylcholine – the "concentration" hormone**
- **Oxytocin – the bonding/protective hormone**
- **Serotonin – the relaxant hormone**
- **Dopamine – the "joy" or "I want more" hormone**

What can we do?

Mindful Awareness/Meditation

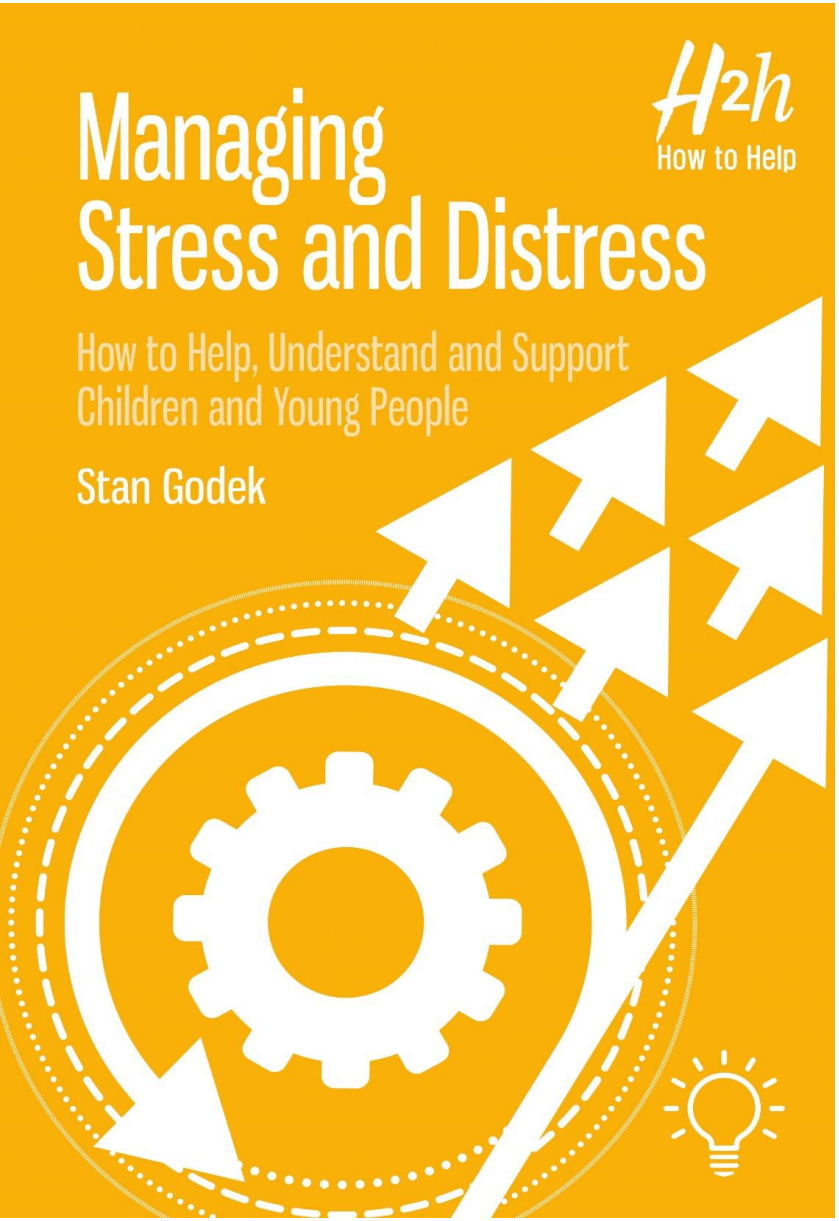
Breathing Techniques

Imaging and Visualisation

Body Awareness

Shinrin-Yoku

Any Questions



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