

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



BEING SENSITIVE TO YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

There are times we may misinterpret the behaviour we see in front of us:

- Sometimes an angry or frustrated child could be worried ...
- Sometimes a child who is struggling to focus or concentrate is stressed ...
- Sometimes a child who acts rough and tough is afraid ...

Sometimes children's brains and bodies are just not able to relax enough, or feel safe enough, to be able to let their guards down and learn.

This is why it is important to be as sensitive as possible to whatever your child is experiencing.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ...

Negative experiences can influence us for a lifetime (Raja & Ashrafi, 2018) and directly impacts our behaviour (Kenney & Young, 2015).

Our experience of trauma leaves an imprint on us: on our body, our mind and our brain (Van der Kolk, 2014).

There is a fundamental shift in how our minds and brains function, and we are left feeling like we are reliving the trauma, that the danger hasn't passed, and that we are no longer safe. We struggle to live in the present, and live in the past (Van der Kolk, 2014).



COVID-19 AND SCHOOLING

The truth is that many of us may find ourselves feeling more agitated, annoyed or easily frustrated lately.

Being in lockdown, and having a worldwide threat of COVID-19 has left many of us feeling threatened. And now... it is changing again as we prepare to go back to school.

COVID-19 felt very far away in Term 1, and for many of us, it didn't seem like it would become part of our daily lives.

Fast forward to Term 2 and we now have learners, educators and staff returning to school . . .

This is bound to leave your child feeling overwhelmed, frozen, irritated and not knowing what will happen next

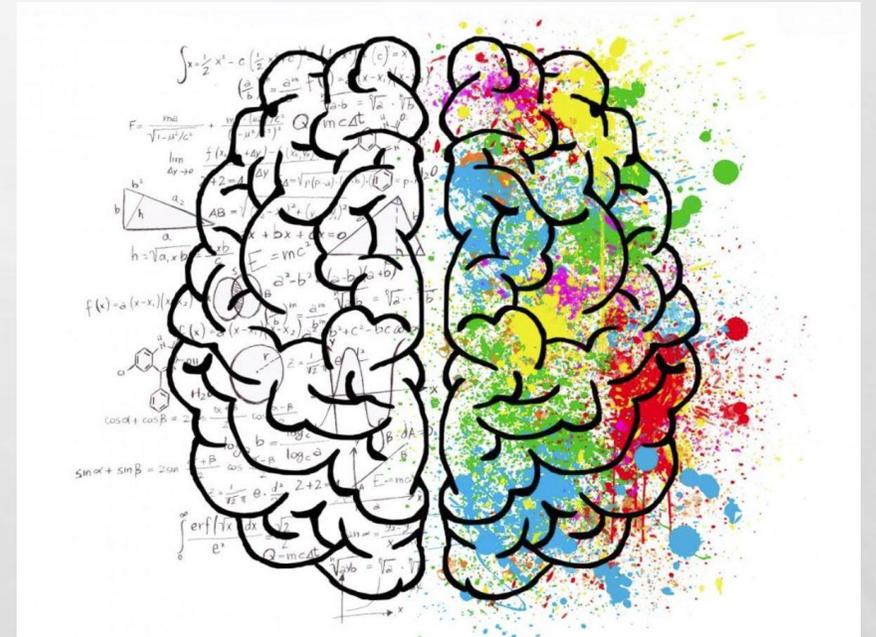
These are very normal responses to stress and threats!

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ...

Our brain's most important job is to make sure we survive.
EVERYTHING else comes second to our brain.

The part of the brain (called the Neocortex) that is responsible for planning, understanding and predicting outcomes to our actions, only develops fully at the age of 25!

This means that your child is a work in progress . . .
Your child needs your help and understanding to make sense of what is going on around them, no matter how mature and how "in-control" they seem!



HOW YOUR CHILD MAY BE FEELING NOW . . .

Despite the excitement of returning to school and seeing their friends again, your child is likely to feel conflicted . . .

- Anxious or nervous
- Afraid of the unknown
- Reluctant to return
- Poor sleep
- Physically not feeling well – tummy, headaches
- Poor concentration
- Distractibility
- Regression
- Mood swings



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE IF YOUR CHILD IS STUCK IN A STRESS RESPONSE

Your child might be experiencing one of the following:

Fight response

- Aggressive
- Competitive when anxious
- Snappy
- Hypervigilant – high alert

Flight response

- The constant need to escape
- Adjusting your body language to hide and protect you
- Jumpy

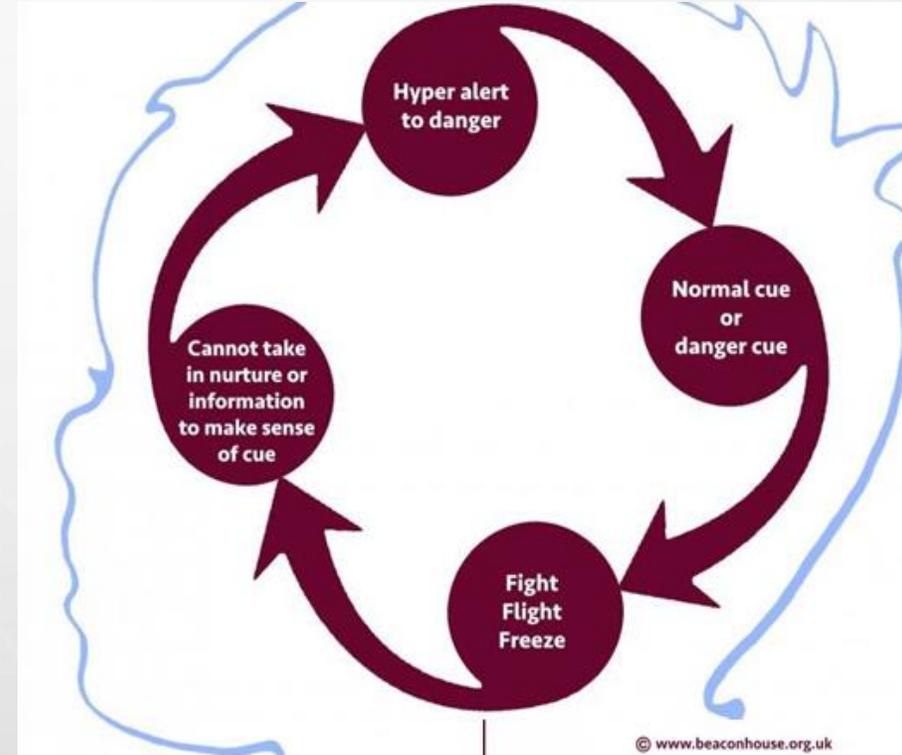
Freeze response

- Feeling helpless
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling depressed, isolated, or tired
- Non-expressive

WHY DOES THIS EVEN MATTER?

Understanding our bodies and our brains from this perspective, helps us to understand how we, or our children, have responded to threats around us and that this is normal and part of survival.

It also helps to understand that if we are still stuck in our past experiences, it becomes very hard for us to be able to focus in the classroom, and learn. We keep feeling under threat, even though we aren't.



WE NEED TO PUT OUR OWN OXYGEN MASK ON FIRST!!!

- In the case of an emergency when flying, flight attendants asks us to put our own oxygen mask on first, before assisting children or those around us.
- We need to make self care a priority, as we are no use to those around us, if we are unconscious.
- Self care may look like any activity that we purposefully do, to look after our mental, emotional and physical health.
- This can include learning to say no, eating healthier foods, or spending time with loved ones (Michael, 2018).
- We need to give ourselves permission to do this.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD?

- The most important buffer in times of stress and distress is our social connectedness – stay physically distant but emotionally close. Regulate, reason, relate (Perry, 2020).
- Practice self care – you need to look after you.
- Try to create an environment for your child (and yourself) that feels predictable, safe, supportive and consistent as is practically possible. You can be the most important contribution for the child's ability to learn to trust the world again, and enhance their capacity for resiliency.
- Practice checking in with your child at regular intervals.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD? MORE IDEAS ...

- Try using mindfulness or breathing exercises to notice what is going on inside of them - without judgement. Try and practice being in the present moment.
- Try to start each day on a new page, without holding grudges and taking a child's behaviour too personally. Try to see the child separate to their behaviour - more than just what they show us.
- Where possible, encourage children and yourself, to share with a trusted friend, colleague or counsellor, about how they are feeling and how they are doing. We do not need to go through this alone.
- Be realistic about what you can achieve in a day. We can expect to have less capacity to achieve what we would have, prior to COVID-19. Many of us are in survival mode

STAY SAFE!

Adapted from : Trauma Sensitive Schools - Developed by C Hennessy (Social Worker) 2020