

TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR THE
GIFTED & TALENTED

Helping Kids Thrive in Today's World

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My name is Christine Fonseca

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST
National speaker, consultant, coach.
Critically acclaimed author

INTENSE HUMAN
Believes in a strength-based approach
and embracing intensity



Who am I?



Painting a Vision of the Future...

- Take a moment and think about your child(ren)'s future. As the picture forms in your thoughts, think of a word that summarizes what you feel about that future right now.
- Put the word(s) in the chat right now.

What does it mean to THRIVE?


TYPE ANSWER IN CHAT BOX



Are you and your family
"thriving" right now?


On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "My whole family is thriving!" and 5 being "We aren't really surviving right now, let alone thriving."

WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW?



"Stress and meaning are inextricably linked. You don't stress out about things you don't care about, and you can't create a meaningful life without experiencing some stress."


-Kelly McGonigal



What kinds of things are causing stress and/or anxiety in your family right now?

TYPE ANSWER IN CHAT BOX


One Word
that defines
"STRESS"

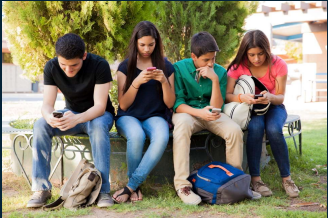


TYPE ANSWER IN CHAT BOX

The Biology of
Stress :
The Brain

- General feeling of unease
- Rapid/mumbled speech
- Reduced productivity
- Heightened or reduced attention
- Emotional upheaval
- Irritability
- Memory problems
- Difficulties learning new information
- Confusion
- Difficulty making decisions



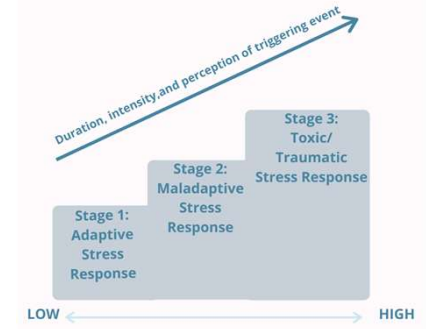


The Biology of Stress : The Body

- Headaches, jaw pain
- Grinding teeth
- Trembling limbs
- Neck, shoulder pain
- Blushing, heart palpitations
- Cold or sweaty hands and feet
- Dry mouth
- Difficulty breathing
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- General fatigue or body aches

The Stress Cycle

Factors that influence how stress moves from adaptive to maladaptive to toxic



STAGE 1: Fight or flight

- ✓ Adrenaline-based
- ✓ Fast-acting
- ✓ Brain tells body to activate oxygen and glucose in order to respond to threat quickly
- ✓ Reduces activities to conserve energy and increase efficiency in order to increase chances of survival
- ✓ Generally adaptive

STAGE 2: Long-term Stress Response

- ✓ Oxytocin-based
- ✓ Happens when threat is not resolved with 15-20 minutes
- ✓ Body systems slow to conserve energy
- ✓ Increased cortex activation to facilitate
- ✓ Relationship-seeking for support
- ✓ Can easily become maladaptive

STAGE 3:
Extended
Stress
Response

- ✓ Toxic stress
- ✓ Happens when the triggering event doesn't stop and/or there is little relief found
- ✓ Often related to both individual and generational or systemic trauma
- ✓ Body conserves even more energy:
 - Routines that require little energy begin to take priority
 - No new learning occurs
 - Brain-body work together to resist change and maintain status quo

Symptoms of Toxic Stress

Cognitive	Emotional	Social/Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Distorted or intrusive thinking✓ Impaired attention and concentration✓ Disruptions to executive functioning✓ Nightmares✓ Impaired memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Increased fears✓ Increased sadness and depression-like feelings✓ Increased worry and anxious-like feelings✓ Helplessness✓ Emotional intensity and/or emotional numbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Increased aggression and violence✓ School impairment or refusal✓ Poor relationship skills✓ Poor social skills✓ Increased risky behaviors✓ Increased tantrum✓ Decreased frustration tolerance

What Your Child's Behavior is Saying

BEHAVIOR	WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS
Yelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm angry"• "I can't control my emotions"• "I hate it here"• "I hate you"• "I have no respect for you."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm scared"• "I don't have other ways to express my emotions."• "I'm afraid here"• "I'm don't feel safe"• "I am frustrated and can't communicate right now"
Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You don't follow the rules"• "You're mad at me"• "You are choosing to be this way"• "You need me to push you more"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm scared"• "I don't have other ways to express my emotions."• "I am frustrated and can't communicate right now"

What Your Child's Behavior is Saying

BEHAVIOR	WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS
Aggressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You are a mean person"• "You have poor emotional control"• "You just want to be in charge"• "You like to fight"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm scared"• "I feel deeply, but the only emotion I know how to show is anger and aggression"• "It's not safe for me to express fear or sadness, so I am aggressive when I feel everything"• "I hate fighting, but it is the only way I can be safe"
Non-compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You don't care."• "You are trying to be in control – and that's not okay"• "You don't know the rules"• "You get away with everything"• "You're spoiled"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I don't trust you"• "I don't feel safe"• "I'm lonely and afraid"• "I don't understand what you want"• "I don't know how to tell you what I need"

Defining Resilience

“In short, resilience is the activation of your emotional intelligence to promote healthy adaptation to your environment that increases your chances of survival.”

Christine Fonseca,
The Caring Child
(Prufrock Press,
2019), page 41

The Empathy Development Model™

Factors that support the natural development of empathy


Using Brain Chemistry to Help Balance Intensities

Happiness Chemicals:

Dopamine

The Reward Chemical

- **What is does:** enables motivation, learning and pleasure; strengthens determination
- **When it's too low:** procrastination, low self-esteem, low energy, problems with attention and focus, mood swings
- **Dopamine Hack:** Complete a task, Self-care, food, celebrate little wins
- **More:** daily to-do list, long-term goals, exercise, creating things



Happiness Chemicals:

Oxytocin

The Love Hormone


- **What is does:** gives feelings of trust; motivates you to connect, helps with attachments/bonding
- **When it's too low:** feel lonely, stressed, lack of motivation, fatigue, disconnected, poor sleep
- **Oxytocin Hack:** play with your pet, hold hands, hug family, give compliments
- **More:** physical touch, socializing, massage and embodiment practices, meditation, cold shower


Happiness Chemicals:

Serotonin

The Mood Chemical

- **What is does:** creates calm, increases feelings of acceptance and importance
- **When it's too low:** low self-esteem, increased emotional sensitivity, mood swings, social phobias, OCD
- **Serotonin Hack:** Meditate, relax, sunshine, swimming, walks in nature
- **More:** exercise, massage, cold showers





Happiness Chemicals:

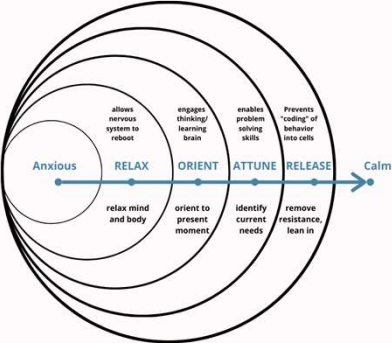
Endorphin

The Pain Killer

- **What is does:** releases a brief euphoria to mask physical pain, alleviate anxiety
- **When it's too low:** anxiety, depression, aches and pains, mood swings
- **Endorphin Hack:** Laughing, essential oils, comedies, dark chocolate, exercise
- **More:** creating art, spicy foods, meditation, crying

The R.O.A.R. Protocol™

A specific technique to release the hold of stress and anxiety



The diagram illustrates the R.O.A.R. Protocol as a circular process moving from 'Anxious' to 'Calm'. It consists of four main stages, each with a sub-point:

- RELAX:** allows nervous system to reboot; relax mind and body
- ORIENT:** engages thinking/learning brain; orient to present moment
- ATTUNE:** enables problem solving skills; identify current needs
- RELEASE:** prevents 'coding' of behavior into cells; remove resistance, lean in

Relax

"I'm going to be okay. I just need to breathe in and out, in and out."

WHAT: Specific strategies to relax the brain and body

WHY: Allows mind and body to regain a state of calm and slow or stop the stress response from occurring

HOW: breathing exercises, tense-release, breathing colors, mini-vacations

Orient

"I may feel guilt about the past or worry for the future, but I choose to focus only on right now. It is all that matters."

WHAT: Specific strategies to bring yourself into present-moment awareness, focusing only on the here-and-now

WHY: Engages the thinking/learning brain and anchors or grounds into your current needs

HOW: mindfulness activities, 4-7-8 breathing, anchoring and grounding strategies

Attune

"What is it that I really need right in this moment?."

WHAT: The process of determining your specific and immediate needs. Includes developing agency and voice to express those needs.

WHY: Initiates problem-solving strategies. When successful, it combats trauma responses and rebuilds trust and safety – both internal and external

HOW: self-awareness development, emotional literacy, discernment (i.e. hula hoop)

Release

"My stress, fear, and anxiety do not define me. I release the hold and lean into all of my feelings, no matter how scary."

WHAT: Strategies to release the "hold" of stress and anxiety, and calm the stress response completely

WHY: Prevents the "coding" of the mind-body response into the cells and nervous system

HOW: embodiment activities, breathing exercises, grounding, self-talk, cognition correction

Strategies to Reduce Social Anxiety

- Help the child develop healthy habits with regards to sleeping, eating, and exercise.
- Teach relaxation techniques to the child.
- Practice positive self-talk with the child.
- Perspective – nothing is ever all good or all bad. Teach the child to be realistic in their view of life.
- Mental Rehearsal can help if the anxiety is preventing performance on a specific task.



Calming Strategies

- Deep Breathing: take several slow, deep breaths. Imagine the stress physical symptoms to “melt away.”
- Breathing Colors: Take several deep breaths. On the inhalation, picture your favorite color. Use blue or pink. On the exhalation, imagine a dirty color. This is the color of the stress in your body. Continue slow steady breathing until the color you inhale matches the color you exhale.
- Mini Vacations: Picture your favorite place in the world. Imagine everything about that place—how things look, how they feel, how they smell. The more vivid, the better.
- Mental Rehearsal



Strategies to Improve Resilience


- Help the child how to be a good friend.
- Teach the child to give back.
- Establish healthy habits and routines.
- Teach the child to take time for breaks.
- Teach the child to set goals, but remain flexible with them.
- Teach the child to be an optimist by focusing on what works in a situation first.



Strategies to Manage Unhealthy Perfectionism

- Teach the child to recognize and own their perfectionism.
- Guide the child in the development of realistic goals. Gifted children often take on more than they can do.
- Focus on the process, not the outcome, with the child.
- Teach the child to have a realistic view of things. Faulty perspective can lead to a deepening of the perfectionism concerns.





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Want More Information?

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