

# Mental Health and Well being in children

# Mental health and well being

**A state of wellbeing in which every individual:**

- **realises his or her own potential**
- **can cope with the normal stresses of life**
- **can work productively and fruitfully**
- **is able to make a contribution to his or her community**

*World Health Organisation (WHO)*

# Characteristics in children

- A sense of contentment
- Zest for living, laughing, and having fun
- Ability to deal with stress and recover from adversity
- Flexibility to learn new things
- Adaptability to change
- Ability to build and maintain healthy relationships
- Self-confidence and high self-esteem

- There is a difference between the very normal feelings of anger, disappointment, anxiety and a diagnosable mental health condition such as generalised anxiety or OCD.
- As adults in children's lives we need to provide them with coping strategies and understanding of their own emotions and mental well being.

# What Neuroscience tells us

- There are different regions of our brains with different functions.
- Over the years I have heard them called many things e.g. reptilian, animalistic and human brain. The guard dog and the owl. Chimp brain etc

# Limbic system

- The **limbic system** is in control of our emotions and making of memories.
- **Amygdala** –responsible for perception of emotions – anger, fear, sadness. Some role in storing memories of events and emotions. Helps us to recognise similar events in the future
- **Hippocampus** – key role in memory
- **Hypothalamus** – The hypothalamus is one of the busiest parts of the brain, and is mainly concerned with **homeostasis**. Homeostasis is the process of returning something to some “set point.” The hypothalamus is responsible for regulating your hunger, thirst, response to pain, levels of pleasure,, anger and aggressive behaviour, and more. It also regulates the functioning of the **autonomic nervous system** which in turn means it regulates things like pulse, blood pressure, breathing, and arousal in response to emotional circumstances.

# Autonomic nervous system

- **Sympathetic nervous system** function appears to be preparing the body for the kinds of vigorous activities associated with “fight or flight or freeze”
- Most significant responses is it tells adrenal glands to secrete epinephrine aka adrenaline. Hence why when you get upset can take a long time to calm down.
- **Parasympathetic nervous system** Its function is to bring the body back from the emergency status/heightened arousal that the sympathetic nervous system puts it into.
- **Enteric nervous system** – stomach related – sick to your stomach, butterflies etc

# Pre Frontal Cortex

- Involved in executive functions - controlling short-sighted, reflexive behaviours, to take part in things like planning, decision-making, problem-solving, self-control, and acting with long-term goals in mind, regulating emotions, understanding rules
- Shares a special connection with the Amygdala - helps to calm and show the threat isn't so scary – however it is believed this connection doesn't mature until adolescence – young children need our help
- Some research that suggests when feeling anxious, anger this disrupts the neurons in the prefrontal cortex meaning it doesn't function as successfully.



# So...what can we do?

- In the long term....
- Resilience building - seen as something we have not what we are. Can be circumstance dependent.
- Protective factors. E.g positive relationships, peer group, self esteem, good sleep routine, healthy diet, exercise, having goals, discipline, praise ( not just outcomes)

# Resilience continued what as caregivers we can do

- Accepting that change is a part of living.
- Making connections with people.
- Avoid seeing bad situations as catastrophes.
- Working toward goals.
- Nurturing a positive self-view.
- Maintaining a hopeful outlook.
- Good self-care.
- Keeping things in perspective.

# Short term

- Calm box/area – may need directing to use
- Remain calm – it can be hard our sympathetic nervous system!
- Don't always try to talk straight away
- Name the feeling – or ask how it feels.

# PACE approach

- Playfulness
- Acceptance
- Curiosity
- Empathy

<https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/>

# Other ideas

- NHS have some helpful information and ideas (including worry boxes) – click [here](#).
- Worry Dolls and Worry Monsters – available on Amazon



## **GUATEMALAN WORRY PEOPLE**

There is a story that when the Mayan People of Guatemala have worries, they tell them to the Worry Dolls and then put them under their pillow at night. By morning the Worry Dolls have taken all the worries away.