

# Addressing Anxiety: What Works and Why?

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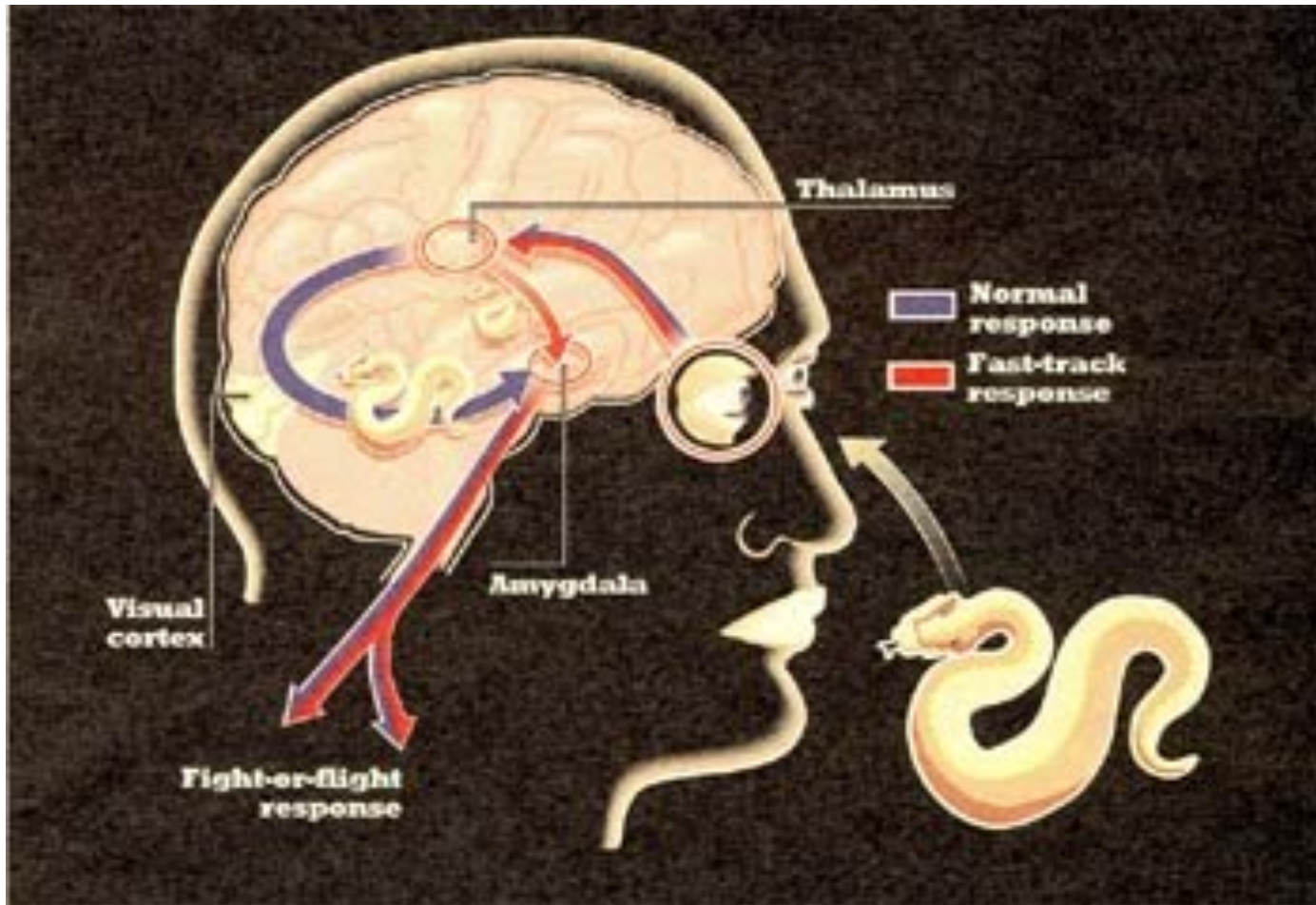
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# Anxiety Versus Fear

- The words "anxiety" and "fear" are often used interchangeably. In clinical usage, they have distinct meanings:
- “Anxiety” refers to an unpleasant emotional state...the cause is not readily identified or the person perceives it as uncontrollable or unavoidable.
  - Anxiety is experienced when the danger “MIGHT BE”
- “Fear” refers to an emotional and psychological response to a recognized external threat
  - Fear is experienced when the threat is **REAL** and **IMMEDIATE**

# How Fear is Registered By the Brain



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# Anxiety Feels Uncomfortable



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# Anxiety Symptoms in FXS

- ❖ Severe social anxiety, gaze avoidance
- ❖ Shyness, frequent worry about social events
- ❖ Panic attacks during major transitions or in response to aspects of environment
- ❖ Trouble initiating contact-often have difficulty seeking help because of shyness, sometimes may avoid interaction with others, may need frequent social reassurance)
- ❖ Obsessive thoughts, repetitive routines

# Hyperarousal in FXS

## FXS Neurobiology

Sympathetic hyperarousal  
GABA inhibitory system is underactive  
Amygdala hyperconnectivity  
Poor sensory habituation

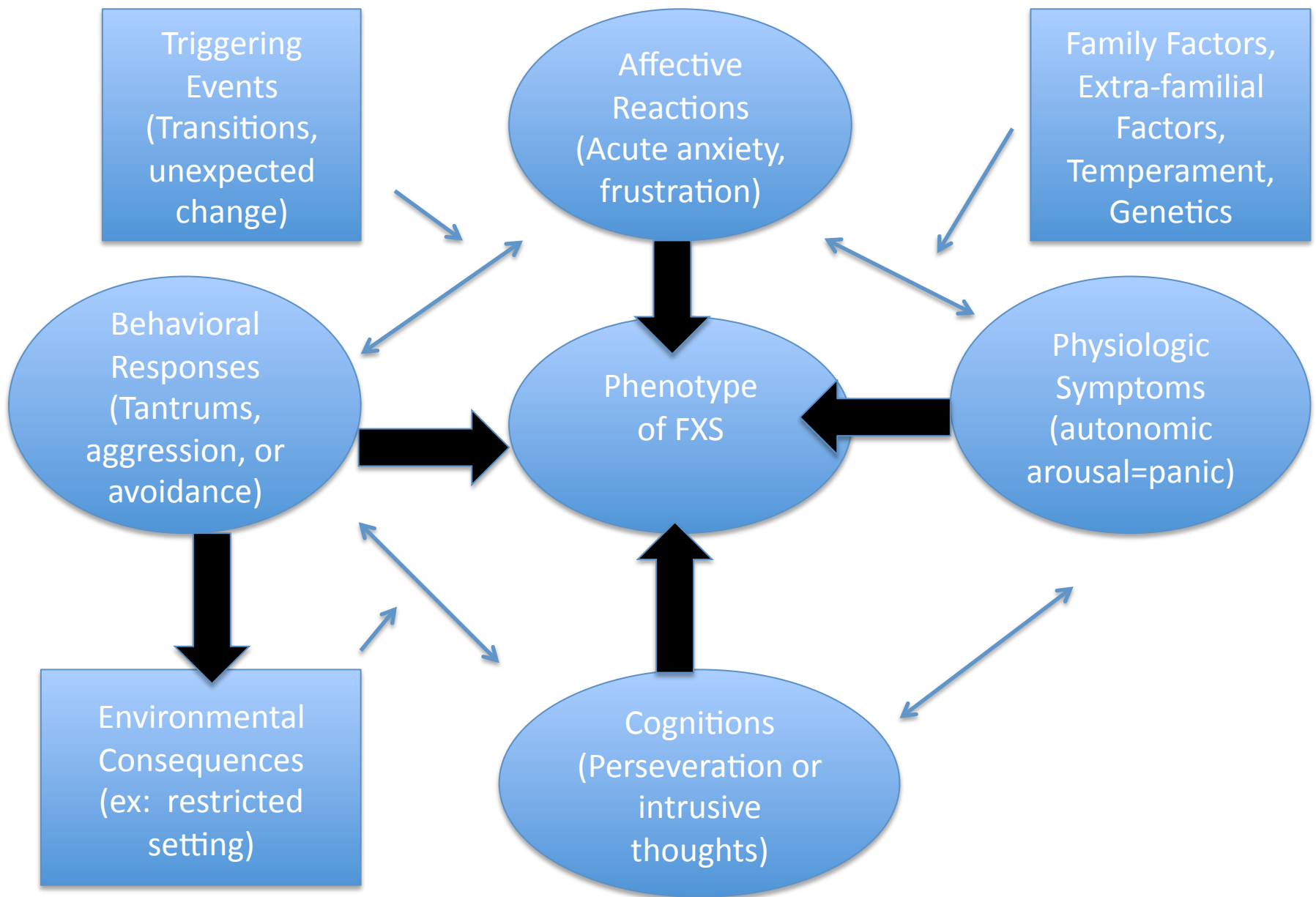
Hagerman, 2007

Anxiety  
Hyperarousal

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## Avoidance

Social Anxiety  
Selective Mutism  
Aggression  
Symptoms of ASD



# Hyperarousal Leads to a Disorganized State

- Poor sensory modulation
- Reduced attention
- Decreased self regulation
- Decreased ability to learn
- Decreased access to language
- Increased behavior problems



# Behavioral Signs of Anxiety in FXS

- Increased handbiting
- Handflapping
- Increased movement such as pacing
- Difficulty modulating voice/behavior
- Flushing
- Tantrums
- Cursing
- Refusal/decreased involvement
- Increased verbal perseveration
- Expresses frequent worries

# Triggers that Increase Anxiety

- Loud noises, strong lighting, crowds
- Novelty, new situations, new people
- Transitions or deviation from a routine
- Performance situations
- Being the focus of direct attention, even if it's praise
- Situations involving confrontation or conflict

# Two Types of Intervention Planning

- First: Prevent escalation of anxiety and maladaptive behavior patterns by planning ahead and using effective strategies to increase predictability, remove triggers for anxiety, pre-teach calming and coping strategies
- Second: Crisis management, Emergency interventions for when it is too late and anxiety is too great for adaptive functioning or appropriate behavior

# Plan Ahead

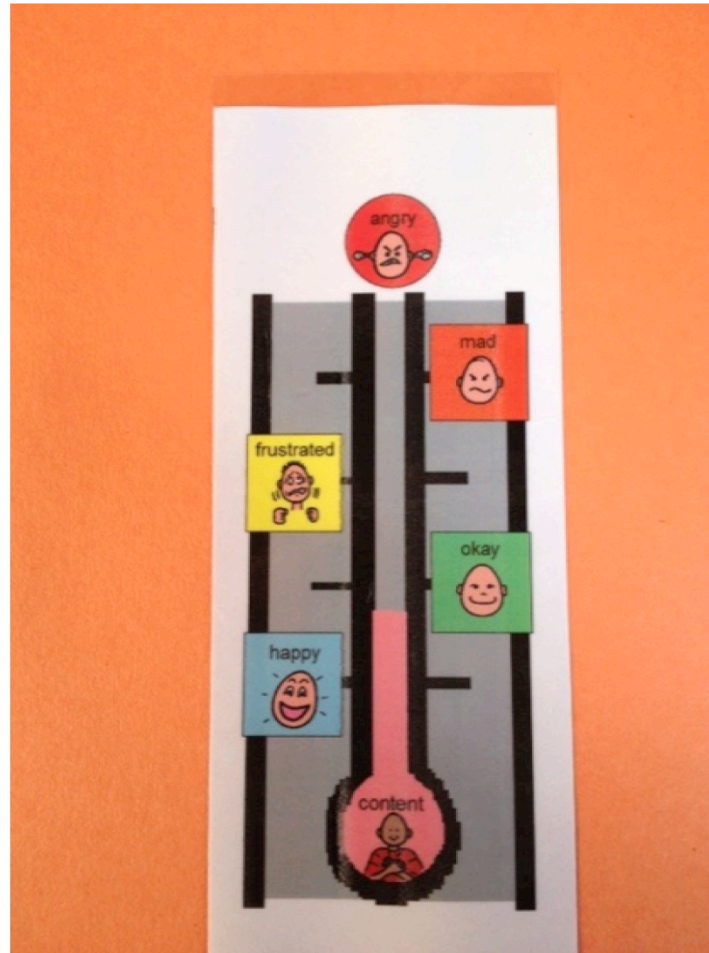
- We use our knowledge of FXS emotional, cognitive and behavioral phenotype to plan ahead so that anxiety is reduced and supports are in place
  - Provide support for sensory modulation/arousal
  - Create predictable, functional routines supported by visual schedules and visual supports
  - Teach relaxation strategies that help calm the body and mind
  - Provide support for communication
  - Teach using simultaneous processing



# Building a Feeling Vocabulary

- Pictures to teach identification of feelings, vocabulary
- Books to teach about feelings and situations
- Label the child's emotions (you look happy, sad, mad) to help them internalize the vocabulary with the feeling
- Use of feeling thermometers that allow them to identify feelings regardless of delays in expressive speech

# Visuals to Communicate about Feelings



The Incredible 5-Point-Scale, Kari Dunn Buron, 2012.

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# Social Stories Curriculum- Developed by Carol Gray

- ✦ Method of teaching rote skills using individualized stories :
  - ✦ Teaches specific social skills
  - ✦ Teaches a new skill to replace problem behavior
  - ✦ It is easily implemented across settings
- ✦ Works for many types of individuals:
  - ✦ weak social skills
  - ✦ fragile x syndrome
  - ✦ autism spectrum disorders
  - ✦ non-verbal learning disorders
  - ✦ a variety of ages and abilities

I Kept My Hands To Myself



I need to Keep My Hands To Myself

When I feel upset, I sometimes put my hands on other people.



When I put my hands on other people, I need to stop.



I need to keep my hands to myself.



I can take 5 big breaths. This will help me to stay calm.



## School Work

Sometimes when I try to do school work I feel frustrated



When I feel like that there are some things I can do.

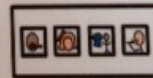
I can put up my hand and tell the teacher, "This is too hard for me".



I can say, "I need help".



I can look at my schedule and see what we're doing next.



After I do a little work I can do something fun.



# Anxiety Management Techniques

- Teach your child to relax
- Children with FXS and autism can learn calming strategies such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation
- Practice a relaxation routine before you need it, so that it is possible to use it when things become intense.
- Calming music, chewing gum, drawing, thinking of positive things can also provide calming input or distraction
- Provide rewards for practicing skills

# Suggestions to Practice Calming

- Model taking 3 deep belly breaths before transitioning from one activity to another, especially before something that takes effort
- Practice blowing bubbles, feathers, or blowing through straws to emphasize taking in a belly breath, use scents to encourage breathing
- Have stress balls or koosh balls ready to squeeze to differentiate between tensing and relaxing
- Teach stretching






# More Suggestions

- Use humor
- Teach visualization/imagery (use a concrete picture of a favorite activity or place that child can look at to think positive thoughts)
- Sing a song for distraction
- Have a mantra for breathing “breathe in relaxation breathe out the tension”



# Calm Down Book



| NICK's Scale |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I am at a... | This is How I am Feeling                                                            | What Can I Do?                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 5            |    | <b>DO NOT DO ANYTHING. YOU CANNOT MAKE SAFE CHOICES</b>                                                                                                                                           |
| 4            |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punch a Pillow</li> <li>• Squeeze Stress Ball</li> <li>• Do push-ups</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| 3            |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call a Support Person</li> <li>• Use Tool Box</li> <li>• Controlled tare</li> <li>• Use Rocker</li> </ul>                                                |
| 2            |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write down feelings</li> <li>• Take a Bath</li> <li>• Go lift weights</li> <li>• Listen to Music</li> <li>• Talk to someone about my feelings</li> </ul> |
| 1            |  | <b>What Can I do to Stay Happy?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go Outside/ Play</li> <li>• Use I-Pad, computer, watch TV</li> <li>• Be with Family/ Friends</li> </ul>              |

The Incredible 5-Point-Scale, Kari Dunn Buron, 2012.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My \_\_\_\_\_ Scale  
Rating      Looks like      Feels like      I can *try* to

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| 5 |  |  |  |
| 4 |  |  |  |
| 3 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |
| 1 |  |  |  |

The Incredible 5-Point-Scale, Kari Dunn Buron, 2012.  
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# ...When It's Too Late

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# Anxiety is Increasing

- Pay attention to signs of increasing anxiety
- Intervening at the start of the cycle is much more successful than after anxiety has reached “panic”
- Watch for physical signs: overstimulation or increased anxiety
- Use effective calming techniques early in the sequence
- Attempt to distract or redirect to new activity

# Once Anxiety Has Arrived....

- Try to interrupt perseveration-reflect back how he is feeling and attempt to help him move on to the next activity or event
- “Reframe” her perception- I know you are feeling anxious but I think it’s because you’re body is excited to be at this new place
- Distract-Try to transition to a preferred activity to reduce stress and anxiety, then when calm you can return to situation that has been more challenging

# During Crisis

- Decrease stimulation (lower lighting, keep noise to a minimum)
- Keep talking to a minimum
- Do not argue or continue to talk about the issue
- Decrease/remove demands
- Allow time for individual to calm
- Stay as calm as possible
- Remove child from situation if possible
- Remove other children if easier
- Consider and address possible sensory issues
- Have a mantra, it will keep you calm too

# Take Care of Yourself

- Self awareness: Be aware of your own triggers, personal preparedness, confidence and comfort level to manage the situation.
- Anger management: Know your triggers, relax your muscles, breath, count backwards, use self statements “I can do this” “It will be OK”.



# Choose Intervention Style

- VERBAL
  - Use the person's name
  - Label the behavior specifically
  - Use a neutral tone of voice
  - Use positive body language
  - Use distraction, change topic introduce humor
  - Make requests for actions  
“put your hands down”
- NONVERBAL
  - Disengage
  - Stay an arms length away
  - Leave the area if it is safe to do so
  - Remove others from the area
  - Ignore verbal challenges
  - Remain quiet

# Respect the Person in Crisis

- Be aware of the need for privacy and safe space.
  - Match your verbal and nonverbal body language.
  - Respect personal space, avoid getting too close, stay calm.
- ✦ Be aware of the individual's reactions
    - ✦ Physiological changes-  
Fight or Flight
    - ✦ Mental changes-  
Attention, focus
    - ✦ Emotional changes-  
Feeling threatened
    - ✦ Behavioral changes-  
Level of activity, speed of movement, flailing, flopping, targeting others.

# De-escalation

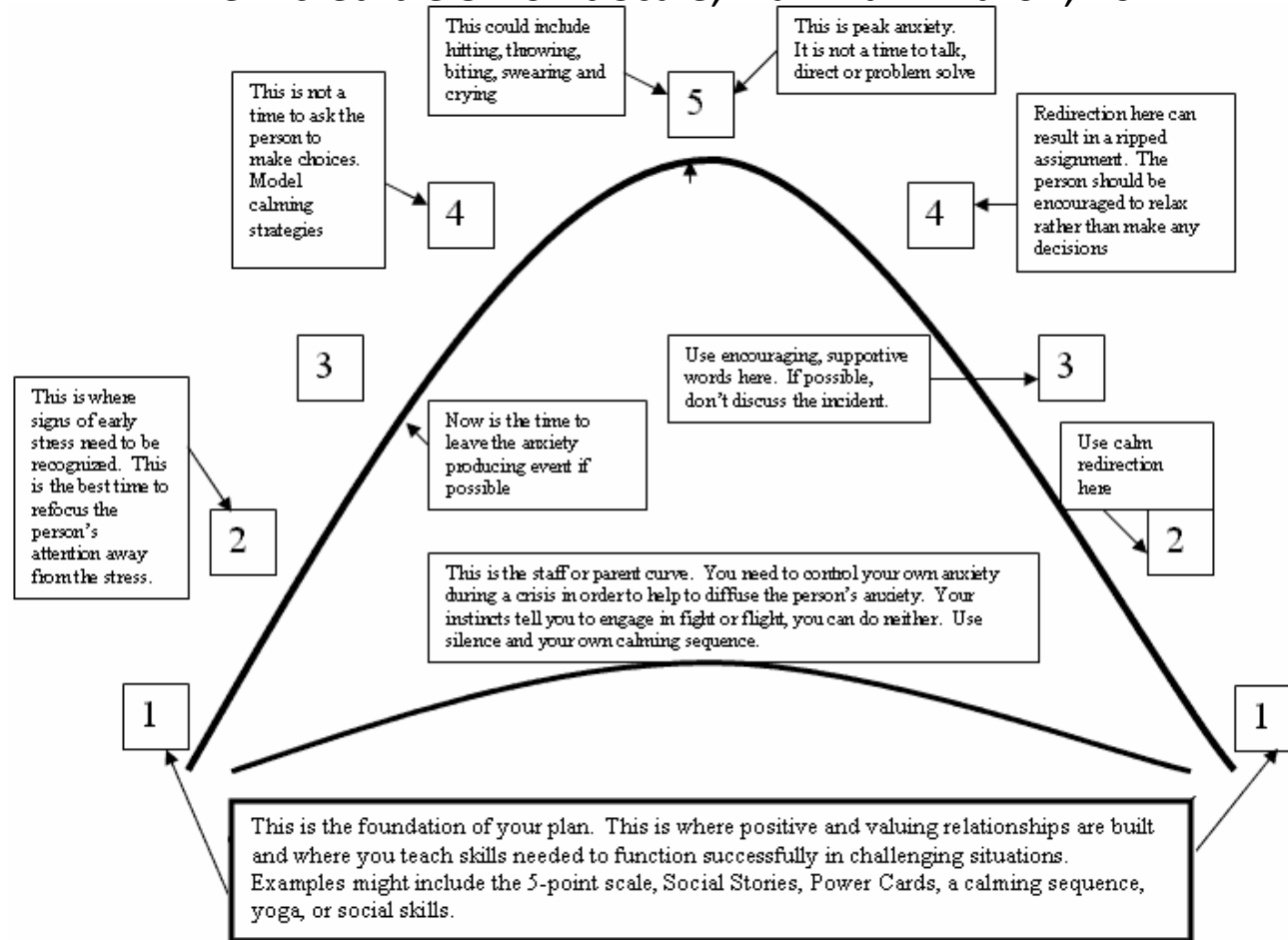
- Safety is the priority!
- Follow the behavior plan that should already be known.
- Don't draw attention to the individual, remain calm and in control. Project a calm and relaxed presence.
- Move slowly, approach quietly, keep interactions simple.
- Do not explain or argue.
- Avoid direct confrontation and allow the individual to cool off.
- Physical intervention should be the last resort for most situations.

# Cycle of Crisis Behavior

- Triggering phase: Individual is not out of control but disruptive behavior has occurred.
- Escalation phase: Signs of anxiety are present (red face and ears, rocking, agitation)
- Crisis phase: Out of control (verbally and/or physically)
- Recovery Phase: Immediate crisis has passed. Though the individual still has signs of distress, stability is beginning.
- Post crisis phase: Individual often may be subdued

# Intervention

The Incredible 5-Point-Scale, Kari Dunn Buron, 2012.



# After the Crisis

- Regain composure.
- Re-establish “normal/typical” relationships.
- Engage in an activity that is non threatening.
- Time to let it go, do not dwell on what just happened.

# Questions

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