


# MANAGING AND COPING WITH ADHD and ANXIETY AT SCHOOL


Kimberly B. Harrison, Ph.D.



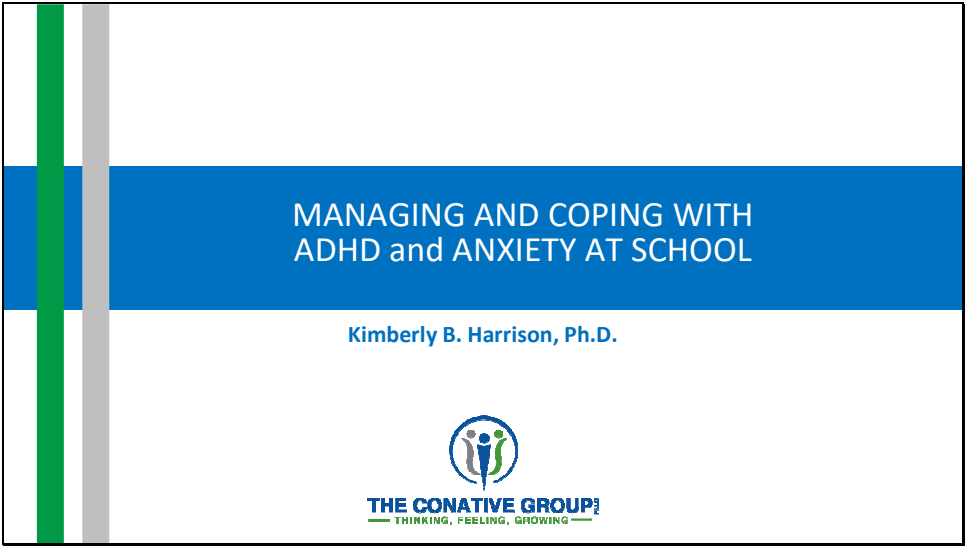
**THE CONATIVE GROUP<sup>®</sup>**  
— THINKING, FEELING, GROWING —

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## Session Goals

- Identify anxiety in the classroom.
- Explain ADHD and its relationship to anxiety.
- Describe strategies to help children cope with and manage anxiety in the classroom

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## Social Media

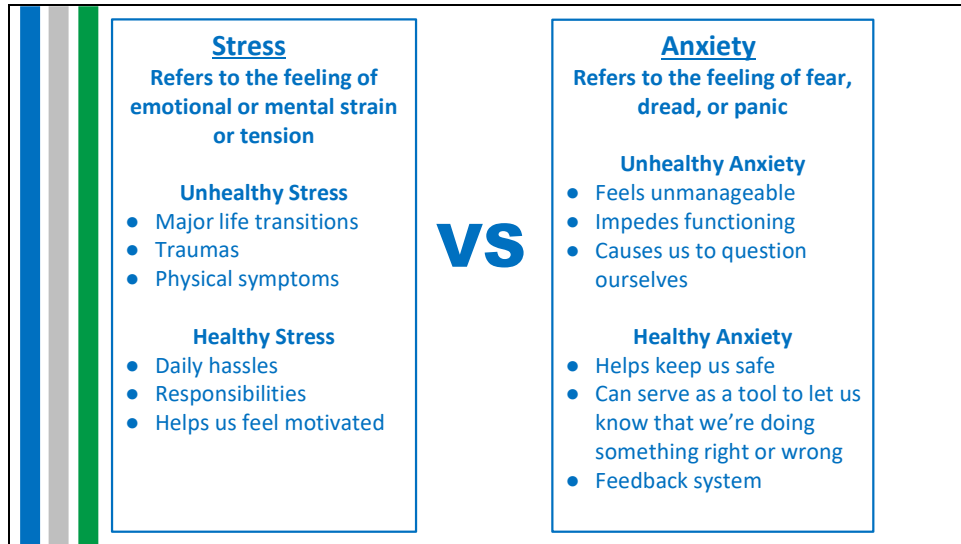
### Sports and Extra-Curricular Activity Performance

- Electronics versus creative play
- The “polished world”
- Comparison to others in the class

- Failure breeds strength

## Sensory Overload

... and so much more!



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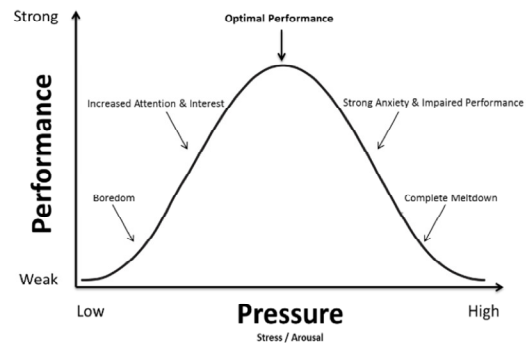
# Yerkes-Dodson Law

The graph illustrates the Yerkes-Dodson Law, showing the relationship between Performance (Y-axis) and Pressure / Stress / Arousal (X-axis). The curve is an inverted U-shape, indicating that performance is optimal at a moderate level of stress/pressure and is impaired at both low and high levels.

The Y-axis is labeled **Performance**, ranging from **Weak** at the bottom to **Strong** at the top. The X-axis is labeled **Pressure** (with **Stress / Arousal** in smaller text below it), ranging from **Low** on the left to **High** on the right.

Key points on the curve are labeled with arrows:

- Boredom**: Points to the low-pressure, low-performance end of the curve.
- Increased Attention & Interest**: Points to the rising slope of the curve.
- Optimal Performance**: Points to the peak of the curve.
- Strong Anxiety & Impaired Performance**: Points to the falling slope of the curve.
- Complete Meltdown**: Points to the high-pressure, low-performance end of the curve.



## Autonomic Nervous System

### IT'S AUTOMATIC!

- We had to “run from the tiger” to survive. This engages the Sympathetic Nervous System and produces adrenaline and cortisol
  - Fight, Flight or Freeze
- The Parasympathetic Nervous System produces acetylcholine
  - Helps us recover from a panic attack
  - Like a “parachute,” we can float away from stress

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## ANXIETY: FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE

3 main types that will show up at school:

- 1. Generalized Anxiety: the "worry wort"
- 2. Panic Attacks: physical symptoms and "freeze" (usually sudden onset)
- 3. Phobia: specific focus for anxiety when otherwise the child is ok (e.g., test anxiety)

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## Common Signs of Anxiety

- Procrastination** (flight)
- Difficulty Concentrating** (freeze)
- Somatic Complaints** (fight)
  - e.g., headaches and stomachaches, heart pounding, sweaty palms
- Tearfulness** (fight)
- Meltdowns** (fight)
- Stubbornness** (fight)

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# More Common Signs of Anxiety

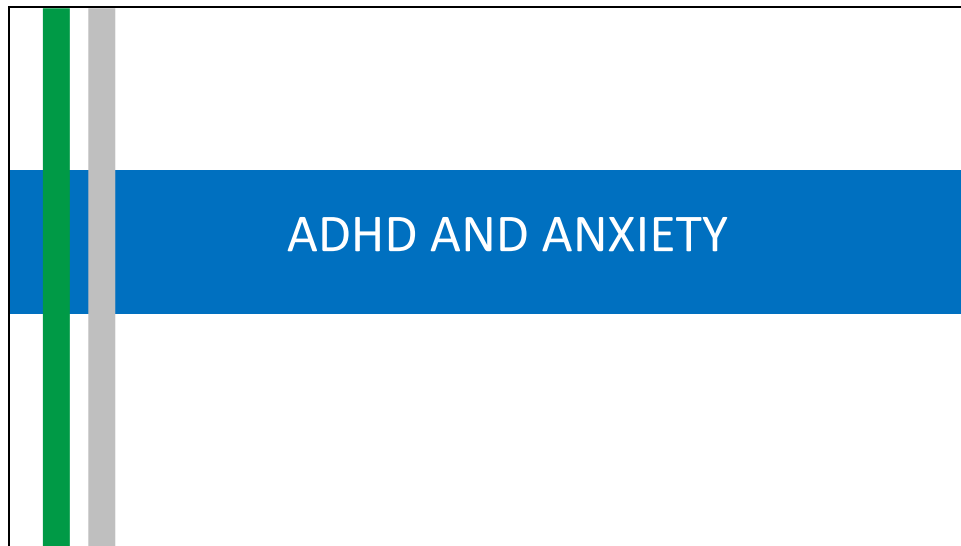
- Avoidance/Ignoring** (flight)
- Perfectionism** (control = fight)
  - Electronics versus creative play
  - The “polished world”
  - Comparison to others in the class
- Irritability** (fight)
- Argumentative** (fight)
- Running Away/Hiding** (flight)
- Staring into Space** (freeze)

### Perfectionism (control = fight)

- ### Irritability (fight)

### Running Away/Hiding (flight)

### Staring into Space (freeze)



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## ADHD AND ADD

The official diagnostic term is:

“Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder” (ADHD) with one of three subtypes:

- Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive Type
- Predominantly Inattentive Type
- Combined Type (68%)

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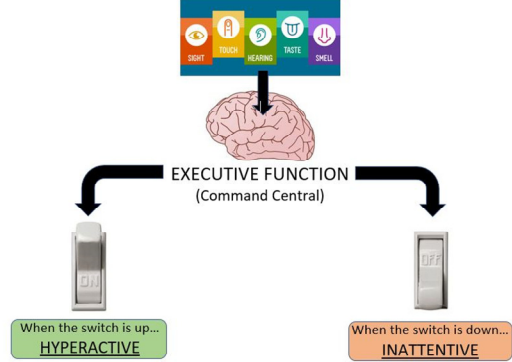
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## The “ADHD Switch”

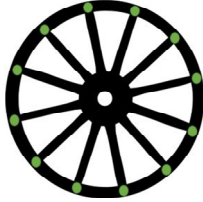


ADHD = WAGON WHEEL APPROACH TO TASKS



LADDERS

- linear
- logical
- task-sequencing
- “hunters”



WAGONWHEELS

- circular
- creative
- task-switching
- “gatherers”

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### ADHD and Emotion

- Characterized by excessive and rapidly shifting emotions
  - With an inability to modulate these emotional responses
  - This is very different from bipolar disorder
- Sometimes, this is seen as general irritability or moodiness
- Sometimes involves extreme responses of an **internalizing** nature
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Somatization (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Sometimes with extreme **externalizing** responses
  - Anger
  - Aggression
  - This often is described as Oppositional Behavior and sometime even “ODD”

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## Executive Functioning Deficits: Developmental Delay

By age 7, most children with ADHD have a 2 to 3-year delay in executive functioning. During the Preschool and early Elementary years, the delay is often in excess of 1 year.

The executive functions include:

1. Self-Management to Time
2. Initiating
3. Planning and Organizing Thinking/Problem-Solving
4. Working Memory/Cognitive Flexibility
5. Organization of Materials
6. Shifting from Task to Task

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# CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH ADHD

Often experience **low self-esteem** and **increased frustration** as work becomes more complex, especially when success is tied to future opportunities (e.g., “If you don’t do well on this test, you won’t get into the middle school/extra-curricular activity/college of your choice.”) This often results in:

- Apathy, especially regarding school
- Increased sadness
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Anger outbursts
- Negative behavior (e.g., acting out, girls becoming more flirtatious, boys becoming “the class clown,” when older....drinking, drugs)

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# REMEMBER – IT'S ALWAYS NOW

That's why traditional consequences don't work.



- Past behaviors have evaporated from awareness.
- Future rewards are not consciously present.
- Often, children will be overly emotional when consequences are implemented because they "forgot" what they did.

That's also why reinforcers need to be at the point of presentation.

- To foster motivation, the child needs to connect present behavior to a sense of accomplishment before they can move on.
- This is also tied to the "shift" feature.

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SO, WHAT'S A TEACHER TO DO?

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## SOCIAL LEARNING THEORIES

- Lev Vygotsky's Theory of Socio-Cultural Learning describes a hierarchy with a "more knowledgeable other" (MKO) who comes alongside a child to facilitate learning with less anxiety.
- Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests we observe and model behaviors, attitudes and emotions from persons with more experience.
- Coming alongside and helping children experience hard or stressful situations will foster resilience. Resilience creates a layer of protection the next time an anxiety-provoking situation occurs.
- The resilient child then becomes a role model for other children who struggle with similar issues.

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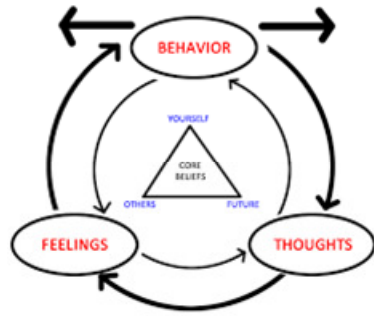
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## Cognitive Behavioral Theory



Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS) influence our behavior. Some common ANTS include:

- Catastrophizing
- All or Nothing/Black or White
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Personalization (taking everything personally)
- Shoulds (perfectionism)
- Emotional Reasoning ("If I feel that way, it must be true.")
- Overgeneralizing
- Labeling ("I'm such a loser.")

## Avoidance Feeds Anxiety

- Avoidance = FLIGHT
- Full blown phobias can develop when people continuously circumvent the things they fear.
- Sheltering children from stressful tasks does not help them develop resilience. Instead, help children address their fears by coming alongside them and modeling ways to effectively cope.
- It's OK to talk about the avoidance you see  
"It looks like you have difficulty getting started on math worksheets."

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# Manage Avoidance

- First, help children begin to think more about the source of anxiety.
  - For example, why are they afraid of a test? What is the purpose of a test? What happens if they don't do well?
  - Or, if they are afraid to try to make a new friend, ask them how it feels when they make a friend.
- Next, help them move toward the threat, in small steps, rather than assisting them in avoiding.
  - Help them find a new routine for approaching the task, such as 3 deep breaths and then start.
- Finally, circle back after they have attempted the task.

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## Simple Relaxation Strategies that Work

- Circle in Palm
- “Hand” Writing
- Deep Breathing (pretend there is a balloon behind your belly button)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (squeeze the lemon)
- Imaginal Thinking (“Let’s pretend we are at the beach.”)
- Visualizing Success

What are things you have found to be successful?

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Sensory Issues relate to the 5 Senses. Have ways to encourage relaxation through each of the senses.

- **Taste**
  - have mints, hard candies, etc. available for those who want them
  - have flavored waters available
- **Touch**
  - have weighted lap blankets, plush animals, pieces of felt, etc.
  - allow PJs or other soft clothes on test days
- **Sight**
  - lower lights when possible
  - desk partitions
  - cheerful pictures
- **Hearing**
  - soft music
  - headphones
- **Smell**
  - felt with essential oils
  - hand lotions

**\*\*These are often based on personal needs, so be aware of what works for each individual and have options**



## Model Healthy Stress Management

- It is okay for children to see you sweat. Make mistakes. Celebrate them!
- Use stressful situations as opportunities to model handling anxiety in a healthy way. It's OK to say, "I feel a little worried, too, but I know it will be alright."  
BUT... don't freak out!
- Remind them of ways they have successfully weathered storms, too. Focus on telling them how you overcame and succeeded.
- Engage the parasympathetic nervous system: meditate, practice yoga, teach relaxation breathing, read, sing...

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## Manage Perfectionism

Model what to do with failure

- “That was my favorite mistake!”
- Be open about failure (e.g., “Well, THAT didn’t work!”)
- Openly brainstorm what to do when things go wrong
- Hand-make things
- Creative art vs. crafts

Celebrate effort not just success: ex. Put the “not so great” art on display and talk about its virtues

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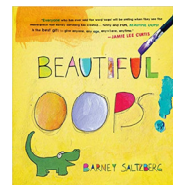
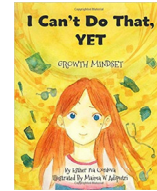
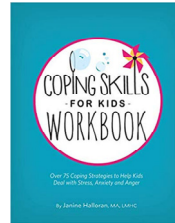
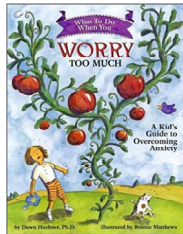
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# Questions





## CONTACT ME

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