



A+ Parenting



Helping Your Child Manage Anxiety,
Avoidance, Attention, Anger and
Awkwardness

Presented by Donna Shea, BA
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Donna is the founder and director of the Peter Pan Center and is a pioneer in the field of community-based social education. Donna has provided award winning services and support for families of children with social and behavioral challenges since 2002. Her services include:

- Social Skills Groups
- School & Behavior Consultations and Parent Education
- Education
 - BA in Behavioral Science
 - Specialization in Positive Psychology
 - Certification in Cognitive Behavioral Coaching
 - Certificate in Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)
 - Certification in Bullying Prevention (MARC)
- Speaking Engagements & Professional Development
- Managing Partner & Author - Social Success Central

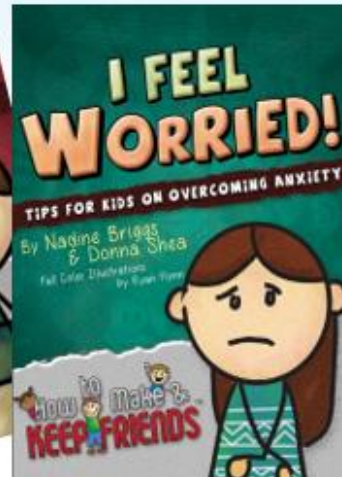
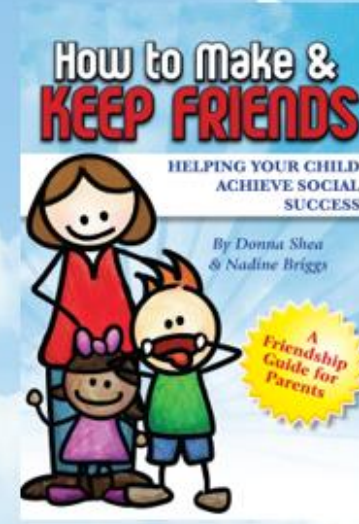
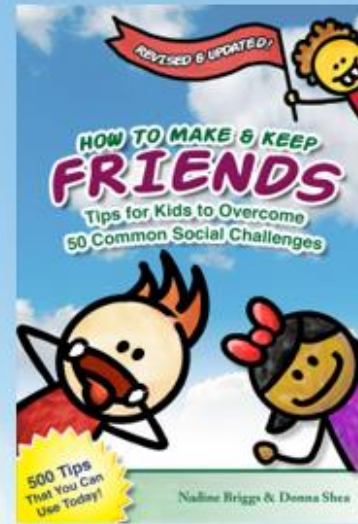


Donna Shea





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A+
Personalities
are
AWESOME
with a little
extra “plus”

Anxious

Angry

Avoidant



Awkward

Active
(Attention)

Anxiety





Anxious kids may:

- Be tense or become upset easily;
- Seek reassurance and prefer being around adults;
- Avoid participating in activities;
- Be quiet and withdrawn, or even selectively mute;
- Be overly eager to please;
- Have stomachaches, headaches, or other somatic symptoms;
- Misbehave, especially in new situations or during transitions;
- Exhibit defiance or inflexibility; and,
- Have a need to control people and situations.

Check the environment

- Has there been major changes (like moving or a new baby?)
- Has there been a loss or death close to the family or child?
- Are parents divorcing or is there tension in the home?
- Is there a bullying or mean situation at school or does your child have low self-esteem related to school?
- Are you passing along your own fears and anxiety?



NEVER,
in the history of calming
down has anyone ever
calmed down by being
told to calm down!

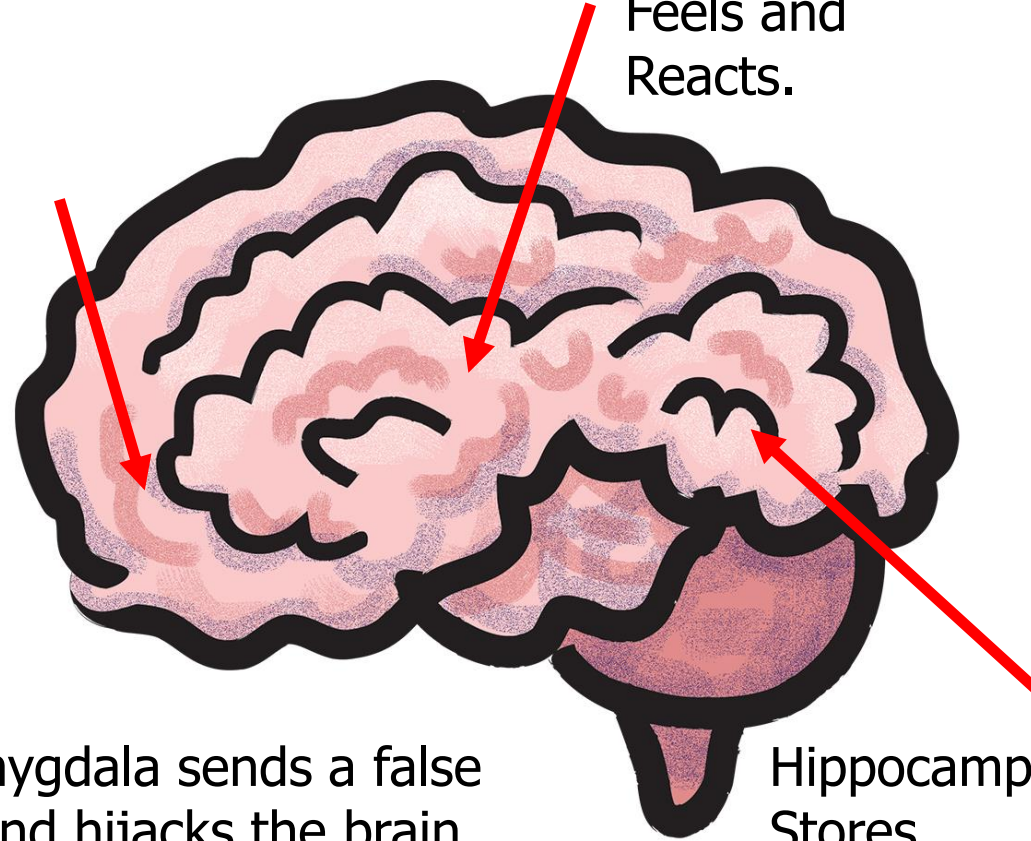


som^{ee}cards
user card

Anxiety is all in the brain.

Pre-frontal Cortex:
Used for Logic and
Problem Solving.

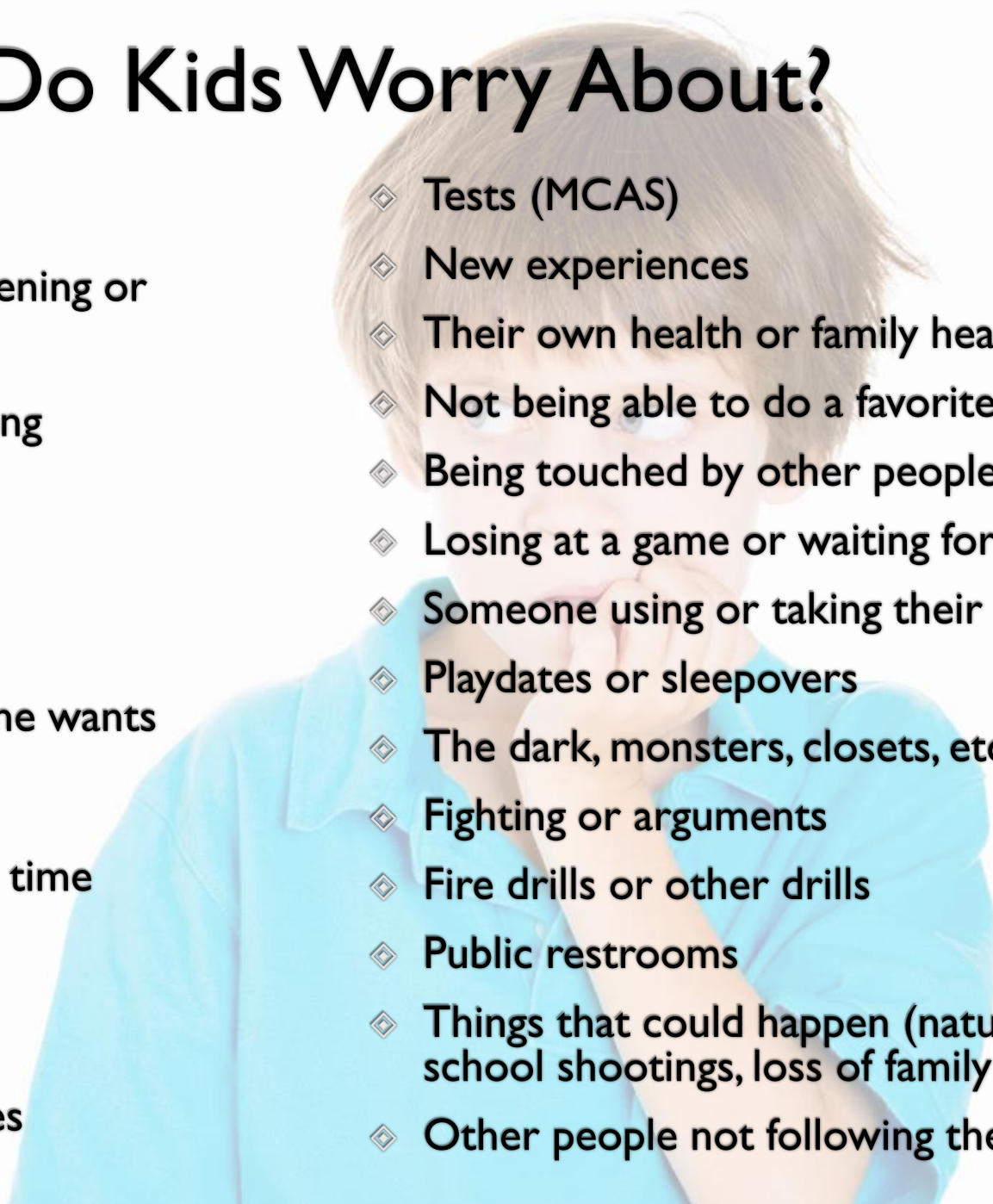
Amygdala:
Feels and
Reacts.



Hippocampus:
Stores
information.

- Sometimes the amygdala sends a false danger message and hijacks the brain.
- The amygdala will then block information from getting to the pre-frontal cortex.
- It will then tell you to fight, flee, or freeze.

What Do Kids Worry About?

- 
- ◆ Bullying, Teasing, or Meanness
 - ◆ Not understanding what is happening or expected
 - ◆ Sensory Input (Loud noises, strong smells)
 - ◆ Foods they do not want to eat
 - ◆ Not having friends
 - ◆ Not understanding what someone wants
 - ◆ School work that is hard
 - ◆ Not knowing how to spend free time
 - ◆ Feeling different from other kids
 - ◆ Social media (FOMO)
 - ◆ Changes to schedules or routines
 - ◆ Tests (MCAS)
 - ◆ New experiences
 - ◆ Their own health or family health
 - ◆ Not being able to do a favorite activity
 - ◆ Being touched by other people
 - ◆ Losing at a game or waiting for their turn
 - ◆ Someone using or taking their stuff
 - ◆ Playdates or sleepovers
 - ◆ The dark, monsters, closets, etc.
 - ◆ Fighting or arguments
 - ◆ Fire drills or other drills
 - ◆ Public restrooms
 - ◆ Things that could happen (natural disaster, school shootings, loss of family member)
 - ◆ Other people not following the rules

How Does Anxiety Feel?

- ◆ Face blushing or hot
- ◆ Blurry vision
- ◆ A lump in the throat or losing your words
- ◆ Feeling smothered
- ◆ Ringing in the ears
- ◆ Pain or tightness in chest
- ◆ Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Irritability or meanness
- ◆ A headache or a stomachache
- ◆ Dizziness or a floating sensation
- ◆ Feeling as though the room is too small
- ◆ Feeling as though it is too noisy
- ◆ Feeling like you want to hide
- ◆ Feeling like you want to yell or scream
- ◆ Tearfulness
- ◆ Tingly sensations or feeling cold or hot
- ◆ Weakness or shakiness
- ◆ Yawning or sleepiness
- ◆ Butterflies in your stomach
- ◆ Sweaty palms
- ◆ Heart beating too fast



BEST CASE

WORST CASE

Teach kids how to create coping thoughts.

- Walk your child through these questions:
 - What's the worst thing that could happen?
 - What's the best thing that could happen?
 - What is the most likely thing to happen?

Helping your child through an anxious moment.

- Counted breathing
6 in – Hold 4 – 8 Out
- Grounding exercise:
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can feel
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste
- “Pop the thought”





Three Good Things A Day

- Try having a notebook (of your child's selection) to write in.
- Your child can write or draw three good things that happened that day and why.
- This is a proven intervention from positive psychology to train the brain to be more optimistic and look for good things rather than things to worry about.



Create a calming kit.

- Modeling clay
- Notebook or pad to write or draw feelings
- A soft, cuddly stuffed animal
- Earmuffs or earplugs to block out annoying or loud sounds
- Something to fidget with such as a rubber tube or worry ball
- Weighted blanket
- A favorite book
- Music
- Snack or chewing gum
- Ipad or tablet
- Scented pillow or another scented object
- Anything that helps your particular child relax

Avoidance





Avoidance

- Kids may use behavior to avoid doing non-preferred tasks (such as getting ready for school or bed and homework).
 - Can't or won't?
 - Think in terms of "what is my child having difficulty doing?"
 - Understand emotional versus manipulative tantrums
 - Soothe emotional ones
 - Ignore manipulative ones
 - Do not debate your child
 - If your child is complaining, but complying, you have one. Say no more.

Avoidance of new things

- 20 seconds is all a child needs to overcome a block and try something new.

OR

- Try one new thing, one time, for just one minute.

Putting a time parameter around a trial can help a child feel more in control.





Yes/No Questions

Did you ask the wrong
question?

- Beware the *yes or no* question when *no* is not an option.
- Give short and clear directives instead.



Use Grandma's Rule

As soon as or ***When, then***

- Sure! As soon as your teeth are brushed, we'll read a story.
- Yes! When the toys are all picked up, then we can play a game.
- Absolutely! As soon as you're ready for school, you can _____ until it's time to go.



Positive Reinforcement

- Catch them doing something right!
 - Behavior that is reinforced with attention is likely to be repeated.
 - Bribery versus rewards.
 - Rewards do not have to be things.
 - Your time
 - Verbal rewards

He's not giving
me a hard time.

He's having
a hard time.

Active
(Attention)





Attention

- Kids who are attention-seekers or have attention challenges can demonstrate behaviors that are annoying or frustrating to those around them
- Ogre-pokers need to be kept busy and re-directed.
- Symptoms versus behaviors
 - Hyperactivity
 - Inattention
 - Impulsivity

Attention seeking

- Stimulation seeking kids get bored easily and will try to set off energy in the environment
- The brain does not care if attention is positive or negative. It just wants a fix. Negative attention can be a quick fix.
- Ask your child, “do you need my attention?” Help your child find positive ways to gain your attention.

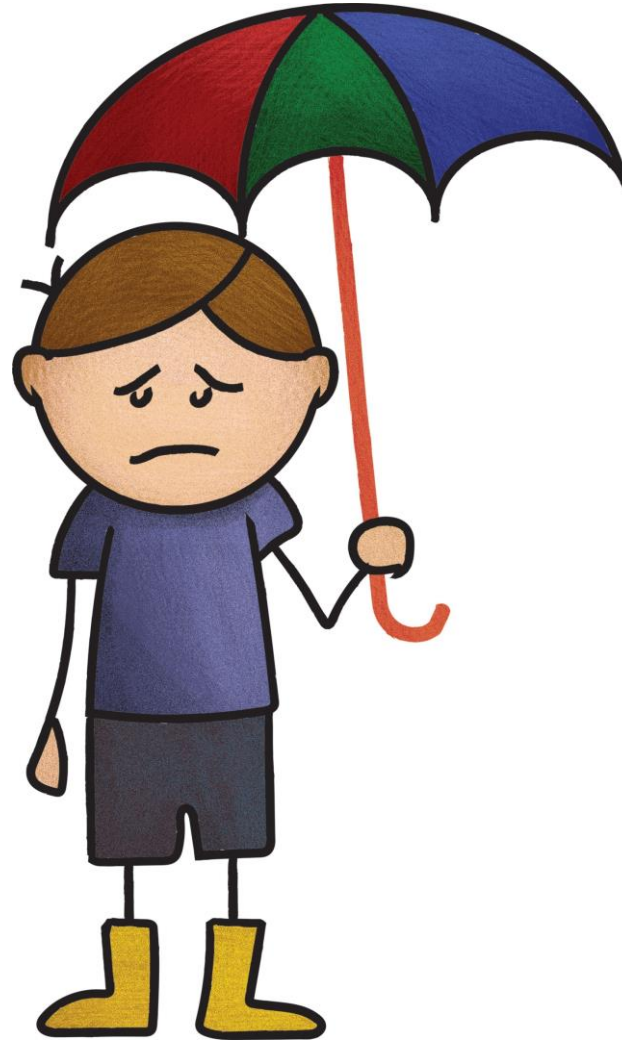




Strategies for kids who have difficulty with being impulsive.

- Encourage kids to always “ask before action.” These children are ready, fire, and there is no aim.
- We need to be their surrogate frontal lobes.
- When you see an impulsive action about to happen, ask, “Have you thought this all the way through to the end?”
- “Stop it” should only be said and heard once. Help identify what action needs to be stopped.
- Work backward from a poor choice of reaction to what could have been a different option.

Awkwardness





Awkward Personalities

- Great difficulty in connecting with other children
- Lack of eye contact (sometimes)
- Misreads or misses social cues
- Difficulty in discerning non-verbal communication
- Special interests
- Literal thinking
- High IQ
- Possible Autism Spectrum

Help connect

- Not everyone has to be friends and sometimes kids don't want to play with other kids. Help the child find someone who DOES want to play.
- Build fun games and activities around the child to attract other children
- Change "Can I play with you?" to "I'd like to play with you."
- Fronts are friendly – turn your body towards the person you are with



Teach the hidden social “rules”

Adults need to think differently because these children think differently

- Speak in a literal way when possible
- Point out opinions versus fact
- Mandatory social conventions

Facilitate peer interactions

- Blending in versus sticking out
- Social matching (read the room)
- When to change a topic
- Red Thoughts and Green thoughts or Bubble Thoughts
- Tattling and rule-policing



Anger





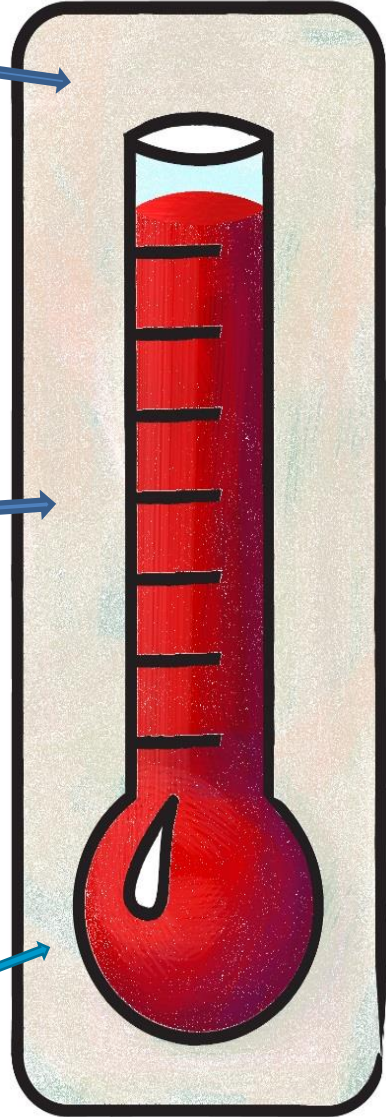
Safety comes first:

- Establish safety rules for emotionally dysregulated moments. It is okay to be mad or disagree. It is not okay to:
- Hurt someone else, hurt yourself or bolt and damage or break yours or other people's property.
- Give kids the tools to handle aggression – throw them a lifeline. Teach them how to ask for a break. When they self-select to take a break, give space.

Your feeling is getting too strong handle, and you do or say something you will feel bad or sad about later.

You are feeling very worried, disappointed, frustrated or angry

You are feeling a little worried, disappointed, frustrated or angry.



5
4
3
2
1

Don't communicate in this zone, wait it out in a safe area.

Use our tips here.

An authoritarian response to a child's emotional response could escalate the situation

What size is the problem?



No problem. I can handle it.



Small problem. I can use a coping thought.



Medium problem. I can ask for help.



Large problem. An adult needs to solve it or acceptance is required.



Emergency! Get help now!

Using consequences

- For behavior to change, the person doing the misbehaving has to experience some negative consequence and learn from it.
- Be careful about deciding whether you are disciplining a behavior (won't) versus an inability to meet expectations (can't).
- Be careful not to consequence symptoms that look like behavior
- Consequences should fit the misbehavior.



WHAT IF GROWNUPS ACTED THIS WAY?

Principal Wilson's Meltdown

The kids will think this is hilarious, but it will lend itself to a conversation about self-control and managing emotions in more acceptable ways.



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