

Everyday Strategies for Neutralizing Worries and Anxiety

How mindfulness, acceptance, and
attention to positive goals can improve the
quality of kids' (and parents') lives

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Disclaimer

- The information which follows is not meant to be professional advice for treating child anxiety
- All children and their situations are unique and this lecture is not a substitute for an individualized assessment by a qualified mental health professional

In the next 90 minutes we will discuss

- The origins of disordered child anxiety in biological factors and early experiences, especially social experiences
- The ways a child's fearful and anxious behaviors function to communicate distress and compel the parent to come to the child's rescue in the form of the "Anxiety Dance"

In the next 90 minutes we will discuss

- Recent applications of mindfulness and attention control in managing unhelpful thoughts and feelings
- Strategies that children, adolescents, and their parents can employ to be successful when strong emotions and thoughts show up

Tools

&

Happiness

COMDIAL

The Rising Star™



DX-80™

Digital

Executive

Telephone

User Guide

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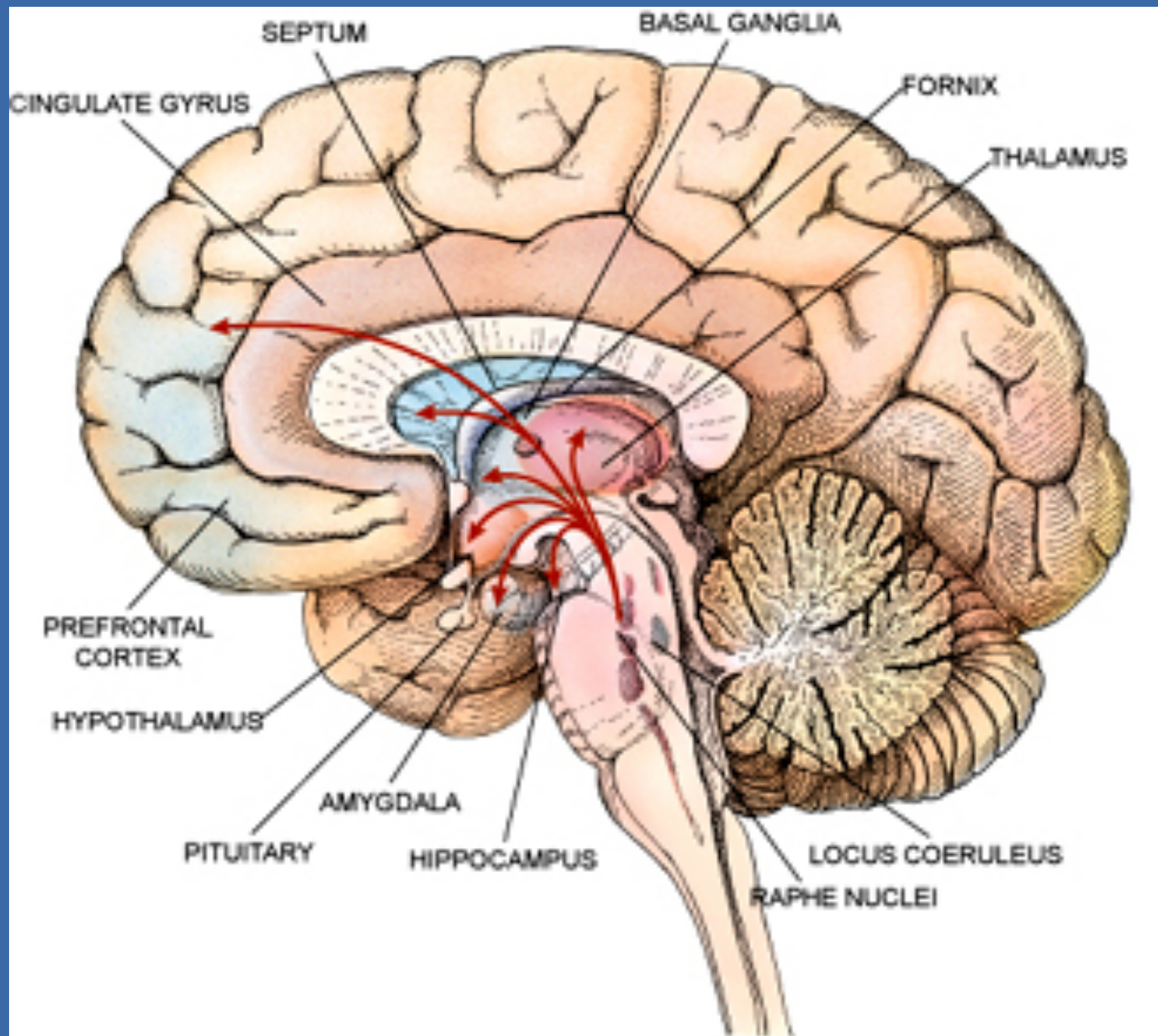
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Fear

Fight - Flight - Freeze - Freak Out

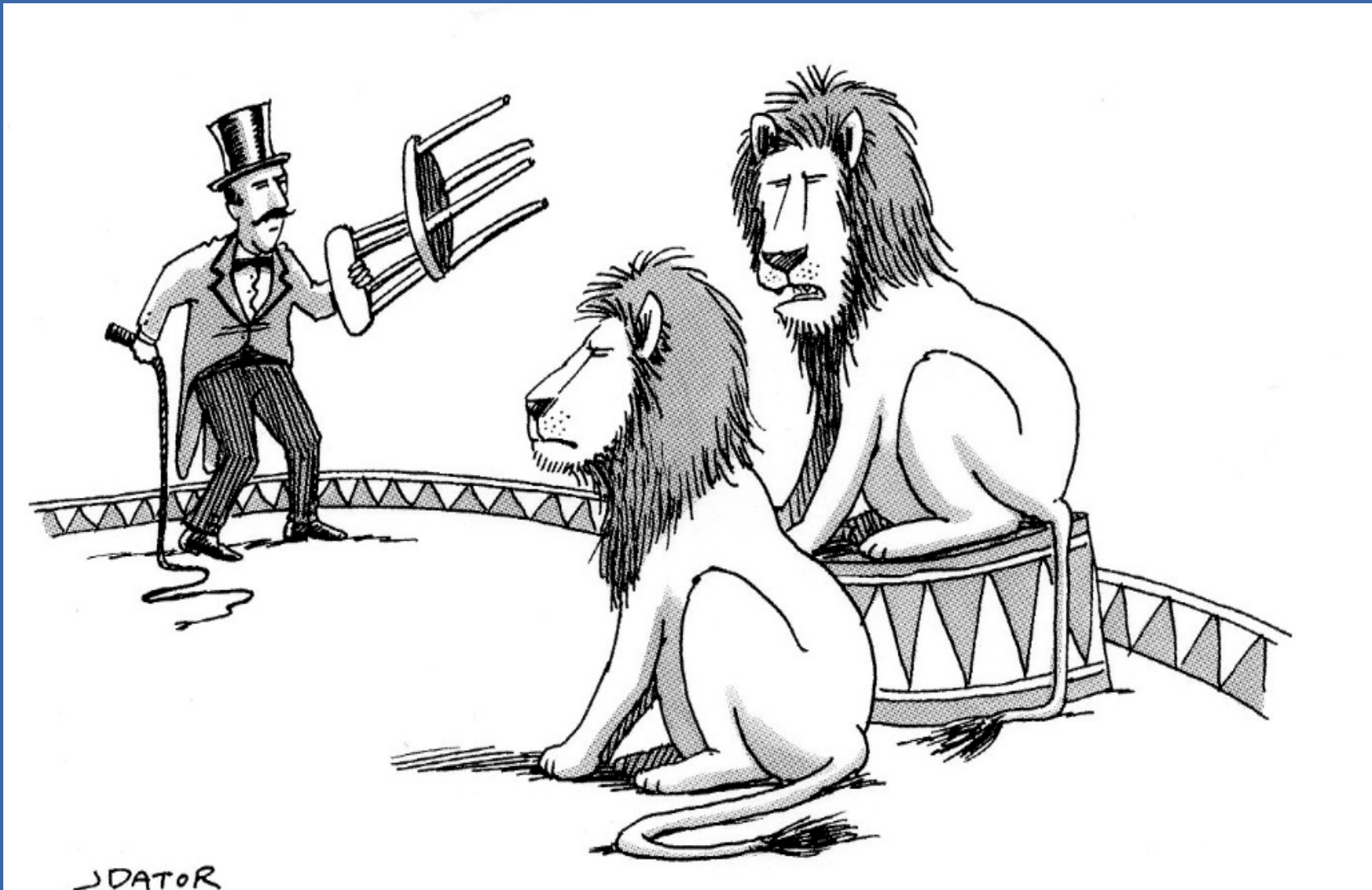
Autonomic arousal characterized by...

- Pupils dilate to let in more light and enhance vision
- Heart rate increases to move oxygen-carrying blood cells quickly through the body
- Breathing quickens to provide oxygen and expel carbon dioxide



More Fear Responses

- Capillaries near the surface of the skin close off; reduces blood loss in case of injury
- Palms become damp, which improves grip
- Blood is shunted away from the digestive system and out to the large muscles in the arms and legs- causes the nausea associated with fear



“Remind me- what’s scary about a chair?”



“dog”



Fear
r



“dog”



Fear
r

Anxiety

- Closely related to fear
- *But*- associated less with actual events in the present moment than with the *anticipation* of danger or discomfort (Ebola)
- Thought-driven (“What if I get Ebola?”)
- Often involves negative self-evaluations, especially around competence
- Content often involves low probability events (Ebola)

We are all the
descendants of the
paranoid people

Developmental Factors

- The child may not identify himself as anxious, worried or distressed
- Somatic complaints (stomach ache, headache) are common anxiety/stress reactions
- Crying, irritability, anger, and defiance are common reactions to fear and anxiety
- A return of bedwetting, thumb sucking, or clinginess can be a sign of stress

Fear, anxiety, and stress are a problem when...

- The child is unable to meet age-appropriate and required challenges
- The child's reactions to these challenges are unhelpful and disproportionate to the situation and/or his age
- Everyone's more stressed than they want to be

Early Child Development



“Me? I thought *you* were raising them.”

Temperament

- “An inherited physiology that is preferentially linked to an envelope of behaviors and emotions”
- Tendency, not Destiny

Extraversion

- The tendency toward approaching novel situations
- Can manifest as sociability, spontaneity, and exuberance or as impulsivity and poor delay of gratification
- Can be found in about 10 to 15 percent of the population

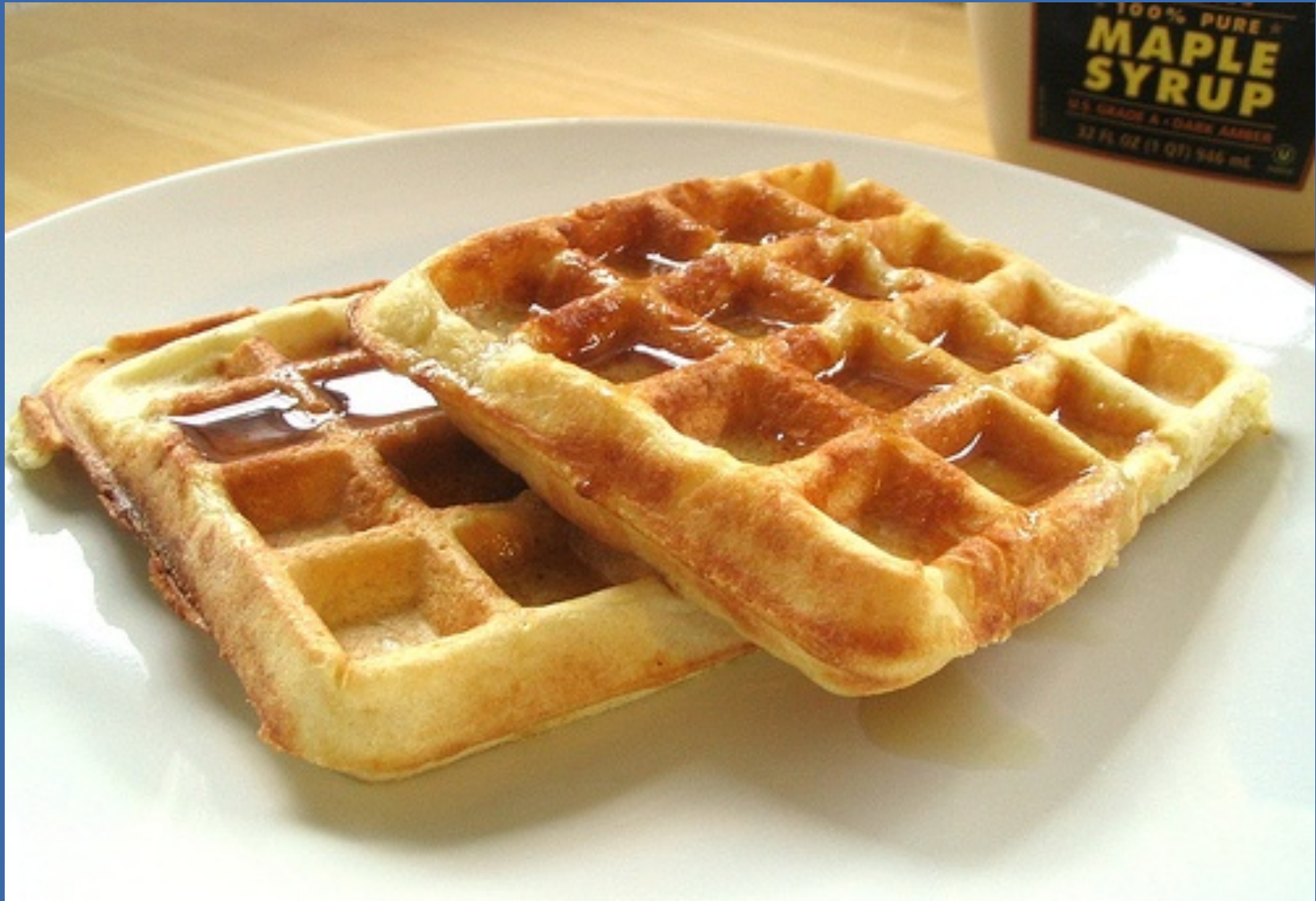
Behavioral Inhibition or *Introversion*

- About 10 to 15 percent of the population
- Describes the tendency to anxious avoidance of *novel situations*
- Characterized by shyness, reticence, and withdrawal behaviors
- Often includes increased muscle tension and increased heart rate

Very Young Thinking

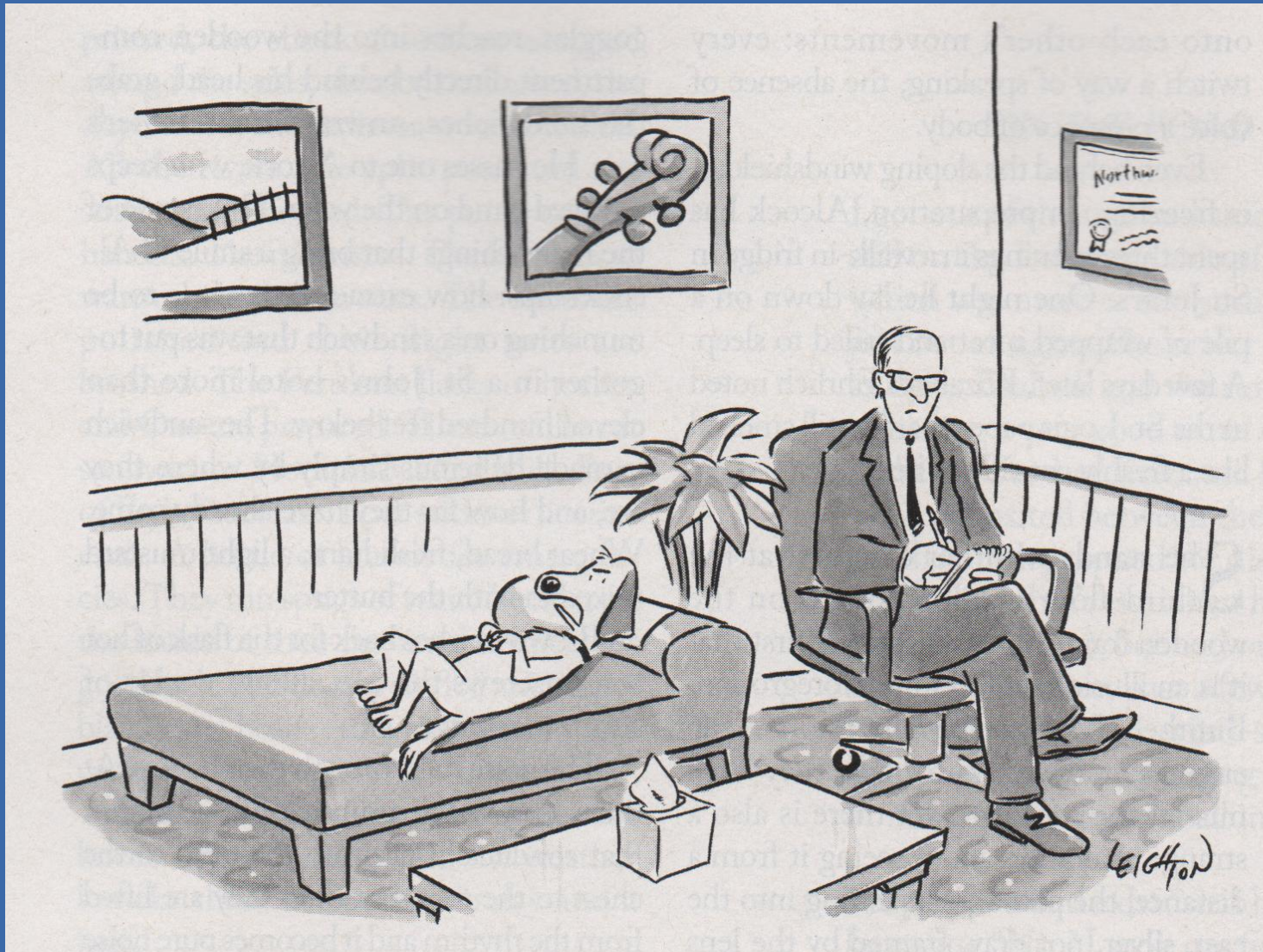
- Egocentric
- Idiosyncratic / Magical
- Psychic Equivalence / Literality
- Rigidity / Inflexibility
- Binary
- Fusion





Cognitive Fusion

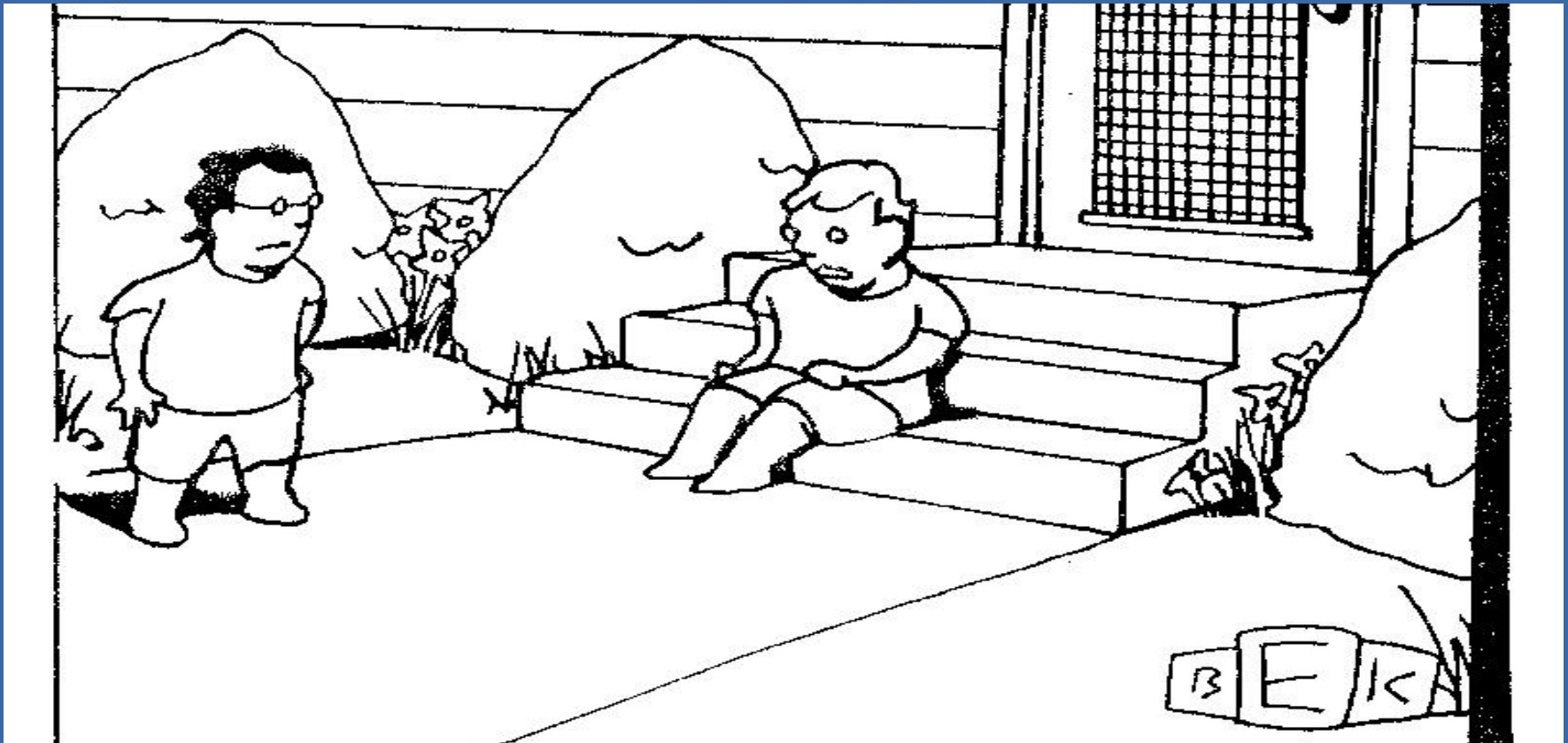
- The tendency to treat thoughts and feelings as if they were directly and immutably connected to events in the external world
- Thought-Action fusion: “If I’m too anxious, I can’t go to school”



“And then it hit me: I’m salivating
over a x#!m% *bell*”

Under stress, they
(and we) will
regress

Anxiety Diagnosis



“They’re trying to figure out whether it’s a chemical thing or I’m just a crybaby”

DSM 5 Anxiety Disorders

- Separation Anxiety D/O
- Selective Mutism
- Specific Phobia
- Social Anxiety D/O (Social Phobia)
- Panic D/O
- Agoraphobia
- Generalized Anxiety D/O
- Anxiety Disorder due to a medical condition
- Substance Induced Anxiety Disorder
- Unspecified Anxiety Disorder

The Central Problem with a “Formal” Diagnostic System

Diagnosis, and
therefore treatment,
is *symptom driven*

The Hairball Model of Psychopathology

t
s



"Could we up the dosage? I still have feelings."

“I can act my way into
feeling better sooner than I
can to feel my way into
acting better”

O.H. Mowrer

Going after *processes*
instead of *symptoms*

Basic Child Anxiety Processes

Avoidance/Escape

Control

The Parent-Child *Dance*

Anxious *Behavior*

Characterized by

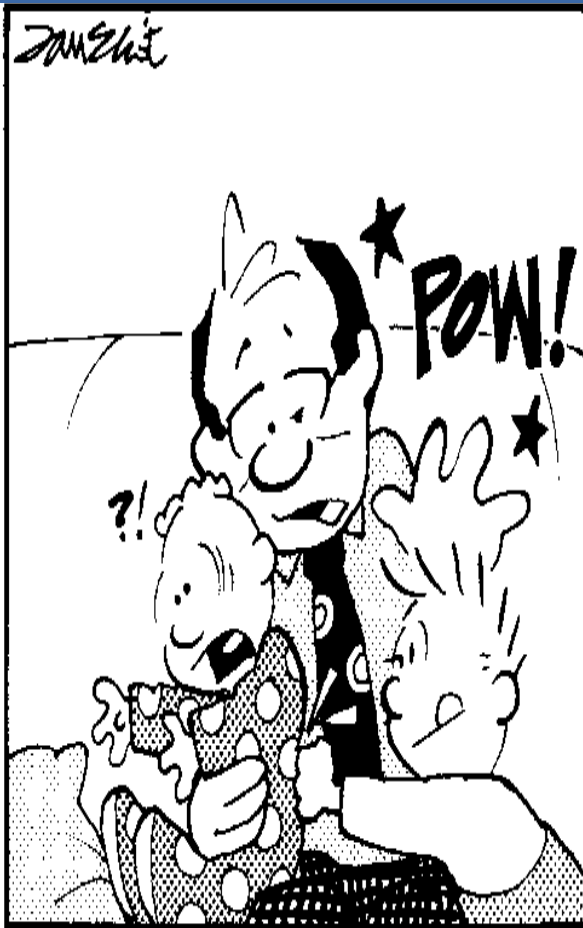
- Avoidance or escape (e.g., refusing to go to the park)
- Freezing up (not leaving adult's side once at the park)
- Attempts to get help/control (hitting adult or begging to be taken home)
- General distress and dysregulation (crying, anger, aggression, etc.)

The Anxiety Gambit

A child's anxious *behavior* invites
(compels) the caregiver to
participate in the anxiety as a
witness, confidante, cheerleader,
task master, lifeguard, *or most
commonly, as a rescuer*



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The Anxiety Agenda

- Anxiety *behaviors* are an effort to engage the caregiver in *the anxiety dance*, in order to achieve ...
- Emotional Avoidance utilizing ...
 - Escape/Avoidance
 - Attempts at Control

The *Reactive Dance*

1. Child becomes distressed (and regressed)
2. Child, seeking rescue, acts out his distress in dramatic, regressed, or confusing ways
3. Parent becomes distressed
4. Parent seeks escape from this situation
5. The immediate goal *for both parent and child* becomes escape or control in the present, avoidance in the future

Changing *The Dance*

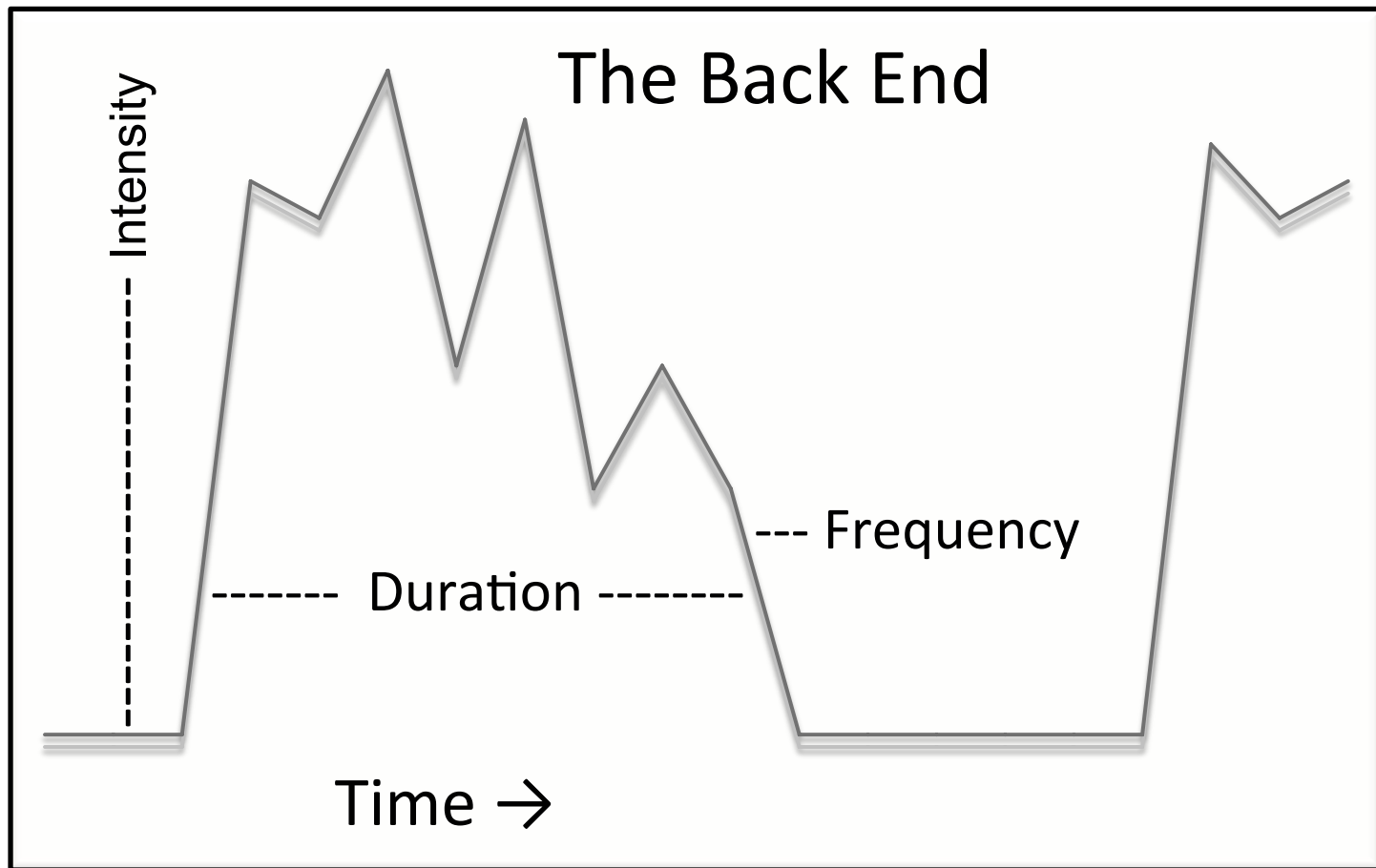
1. Increase awareness
2. Change the focus of attention
3. Take values-driven action

A Responsive Dance

1. High-risk situations are identified and planned for
2. Aware of history, parent *is alert to* possible distress and regression in this situation
 - Child becomes anxious/fearful
 - Child, seeking rescue, acts out his distress in dramatic, regressed, and/or confusing ways
 - Parent becomes distressed, *but then...*

A Responsive Dance

3. Parent acknowledges the anxiety/fear with specific language
4. Makes connections to the cause of the distress and to the child's current "wanna-do's"
5. Models distress tolerance
6. Orients the child to the original goal, coping skills, or to a viable solution to the *actual* problem, if there is one



Step 1

Increase
(everybody's)
Awareness

S.O.B.E.R.

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
- Expand
- Respond

Tubes

S.O.B.E.R.

- Stop
- Observe
- Breathe
- Expand
- Respond

Graybar's First Law of Human Behavior

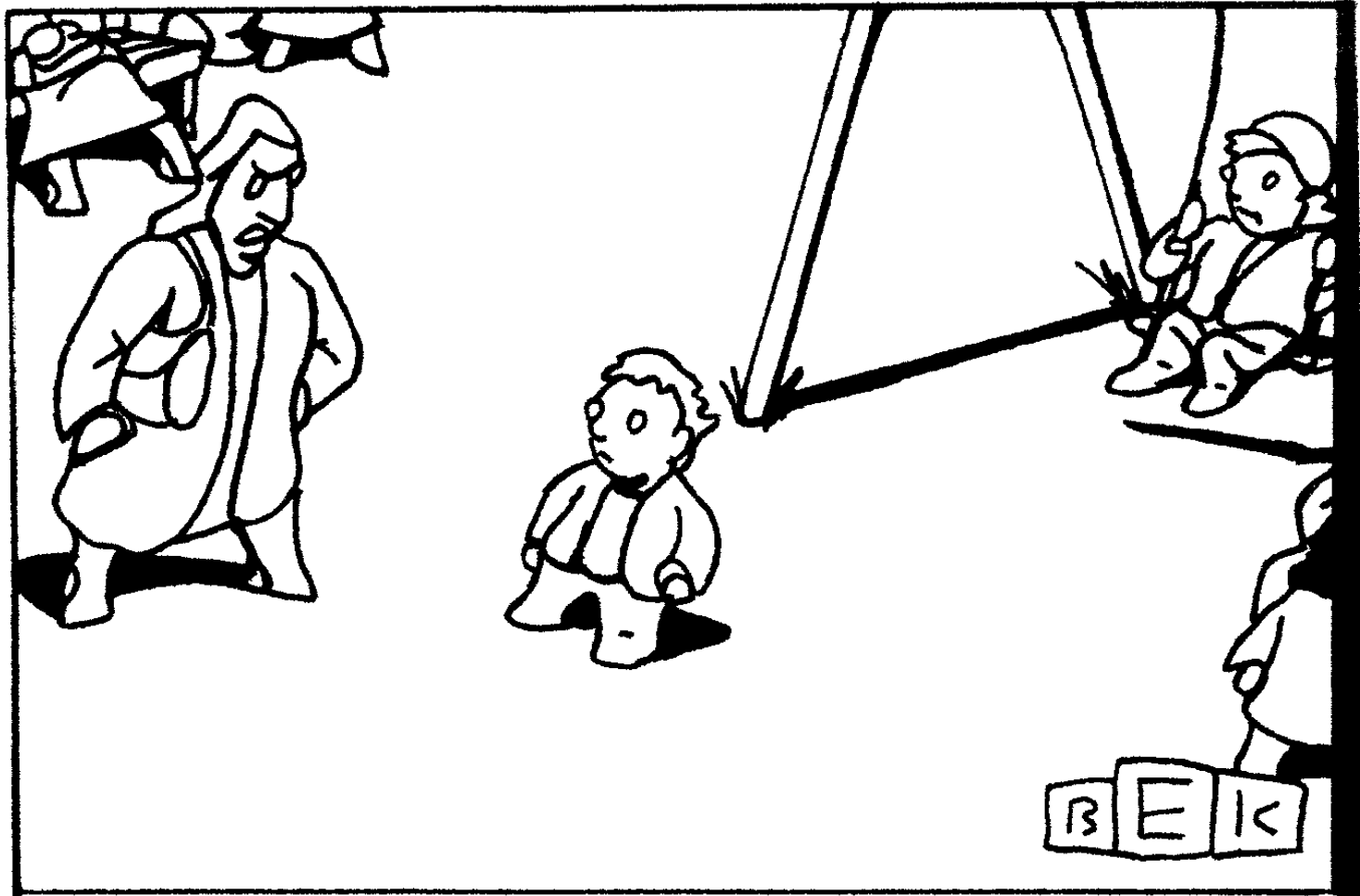
“All behavior is a message, and a behavior won't begin to change until the person knows his message has been received”

Validation

- Closes the communication loop: “message received”
- Provides accurate and nuanced emotional vocabulary
- Replaces ineffective *reassurance* in many situations
- Says nothing the “appropriateness” of that thought or feeling at the time

Validation Strategies

- Simple and specific “Ah” statements;
 - “Ah, you’re feeling ...”
 - “Ah, you’re having those ‘I can’t do it’ ideas now”
- Identify expectations;
 - “You expected your friend would be at the party”
 - “You weren’t expecting a fire drill today”
- “I wonder” statements



“Mommy needs to get mad at you in a weird calm voice now”

Whole Body Validation

Increasing Awareness: Mindfulness, Classic Definitions

- Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally
- Bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis

More “Active” Definitions of Mindfulness

- Stepping back from unproductive ways of coping . . . in order to see more clearly how best to respond
- An open, probabilistic state of mind...
finding differences among things thought similar and similarities among things thought different

Mindfulness or “Radical Mono-tasking”

- The Five Senses
- Breathing
- Everyday noticing (color of the day)
- Mindful eating
- Touch and movement (non-dominant hand)

Step 2

Shift the Focus of
Attention

Or

“Change the Channel”

The Role of Attention

The word “attention” comes
from the Latin *attendere*,
meaning
“to stretch forward”

As opposed to “vigilance”

The Attention Spotlight

- Orienting to an “affect neutral” stimulus: breathing, muscle tone
- Shifting attention from negative feelings and ideas to actionable goals: “change the channel”
- The “distraction paradox”

Breathing Exercises

- Belly Breath
- Finding Your Breath
- Ferris Wheel Breath
- Darth Vader Breath
- Alien Breath

Cognitive Fusion

- The tendency to treat thoughts and feelings as if they were directly and immutably connected to events in the external world
- Thought-Action fusion: “If I’m too anxious, I can’t go to school”

Defusion

- Similar to mindfulness
- Not changing thoughts and feelings but *stepping back* from them
- Thoughts and emotions are experienced as transient events; sometimes important, often not
- “Don’t believe everything you believe”

Defusion Exercises

- Naming and cataloging
- Emotional vocabulary
- Boats on a river
- Goggles
- Matt Smith

Defusion Exercises

- Naming and cataloging
- Emotional vocabulary
- Boats on a river
- Goggles
- Matt Smith

Matt Smith is a big, fat idiot.





What if....?



“I can’t stand this any more”



Definitions of Acceptance

- To agree or consent to
- To regard as true or valid
- To take or receive what is offered
- To accommodate or reconcile oneself to

Acceptance

- Contacting present experience *as it is* and not as it *says* it is
- The opposite of avoidance and control; not challenging experience or trying to get “one up” on it
- Neither tolerance nor resignation, not passive or fatalistic
- “Be equal to your fate”

Thank your mind for
its concern

Step 3

Take Values-Driven
Action

Willingness
vs
“Wantingness”

Classic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Exposure / Response Prevention

leads to

Cognitive Reappraisal

which leads to

Increased willingness

and so on

Choices and Decisions

Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A Good
Teammate

Effort, Anxiety,
Frustration,
Sacrifice,
Conscientiousness

Commitment and Acceptance: Two Sides of the Same Coin

To Be A Good
Student

Effort, Anxiety,
Frustration,
Sacrifice,
Conscientiousness

Carl Jung

“Life’s truly important problems cannot be solved, they can only be outgrown”