

# Supportive Parenting for anxious childhood emotions

#### Linda Loftsdottir

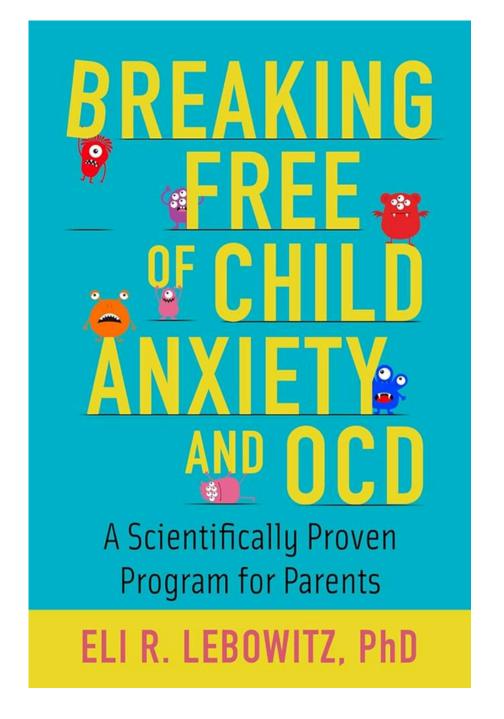
**CAMHS Mental Health Practitioner** 

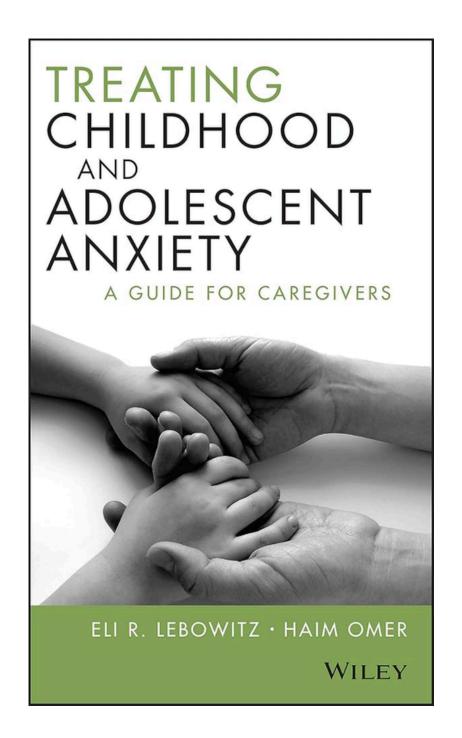
Jersey College for Girls Thursday 6th March 2025











ABCT CLINICAL PRACTICE SERIES Addressing Parental Accommodation When Treating Anxiety in Children Eli R. Lebowitz





#### What would you do if they were in danger?











## Why focus on the parents?



- You are in control and can change your behaviour
- Co-regulation child looks to you when trying to regulate
- Often our support is not helping
- To better understand family accommodations and how we can stop them





## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is there to protect us and keep us safe. It is a system that helps us become aware of possible threats and dangers.

Our anxiety system responds in the same way whether the threat may be real or imaginary.

Fight, flight, freeze responses.







## It impacts all four domains





**THOUGHTS** 

**BEHAVIOURS** 





**FEELINGS** 

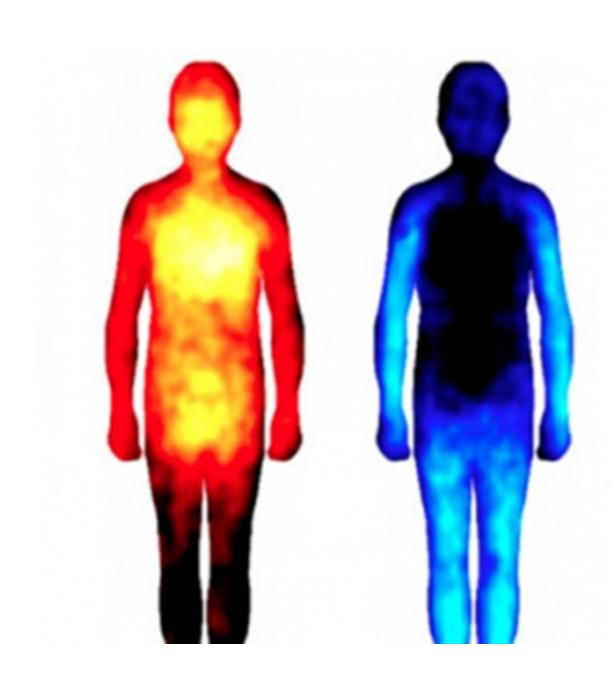
**BODY** 





## Body

- Stomach ache / butterflies
- Headache
- Nausea
- Frequent need to go to the toilet
- Dizziness
- Dry throat
- Trembling
- Sweaty
- Palpitations / pounding heart
- Rapid breathing
- Muscle tension







## Thoughts

- 'Something terrible is going to happen'
- 'There is something wrong with me'
- 'I can't cope'
- 'I will make a fool of myself'
- 'No one will like me'
- 'I can't do this'
- Poor concentration

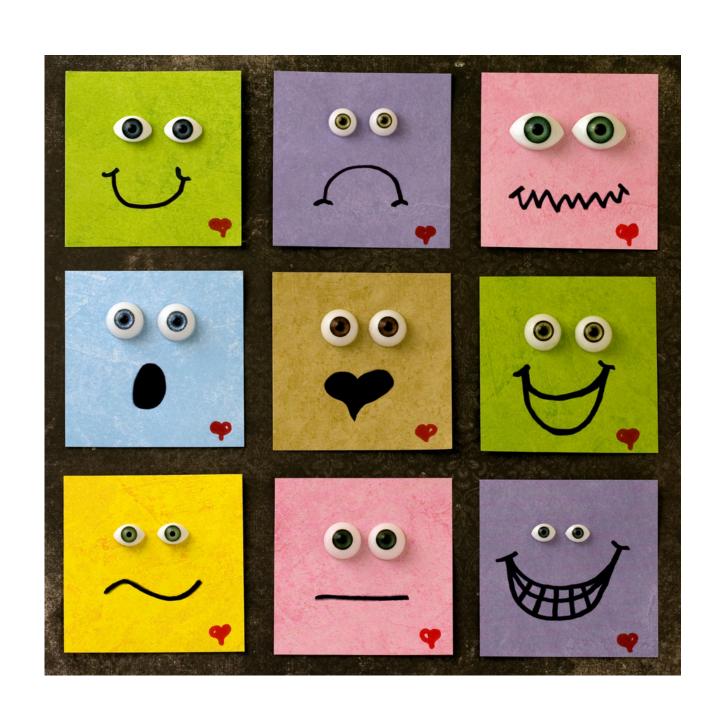






#### Emotions

- Fear
- Stress
- Embarrassment
- Shame
- Anger
- Guilt
- Feeling 'on edge'
- Feeling of apprehension or dread
- Irritability







#### Behaviour

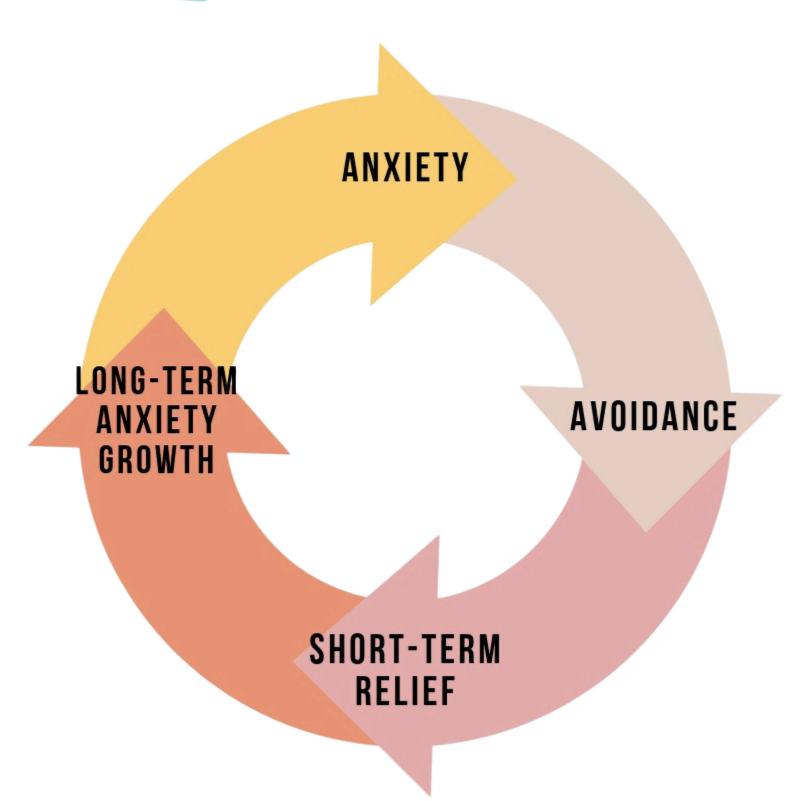
- Avoidance
- Procrastination
- Poor sleep
- Distracted
- Verbally or physically aggressive
- Substance misuse
- Blaming self or others
- Self-harm
- Becoming overly attached to a safety object or person
- Pacing / fidgeting











Avoiding situations that produce feelings of anxiousness actually INCREASES your anxiety in the long run.

When you begin to avoid negative emotions associated with anxiety, you decrease your ability to tolerate distress or risk.

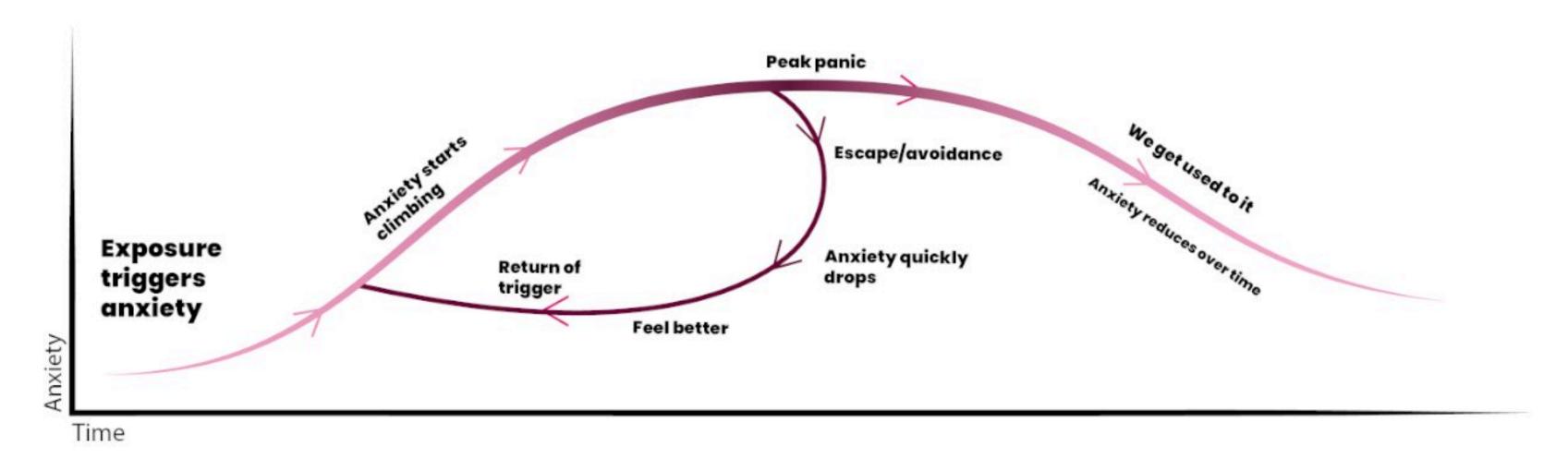
In short, the fear that initially led to avoidance worsens and the brain learns that when the anxiety-producing situation is avoided, the symptoms go away.

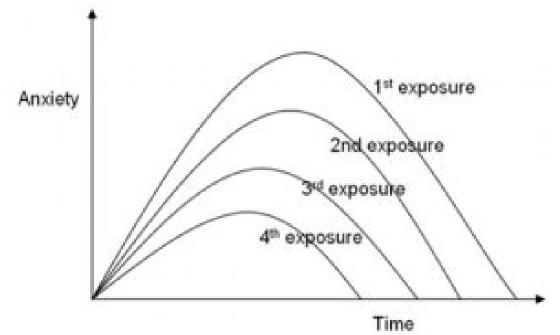
As a result, the symptoms of anxiety will be worse the next time and avoidance is more likely. This repetitive cycle keeps you stuck in your anxiety!















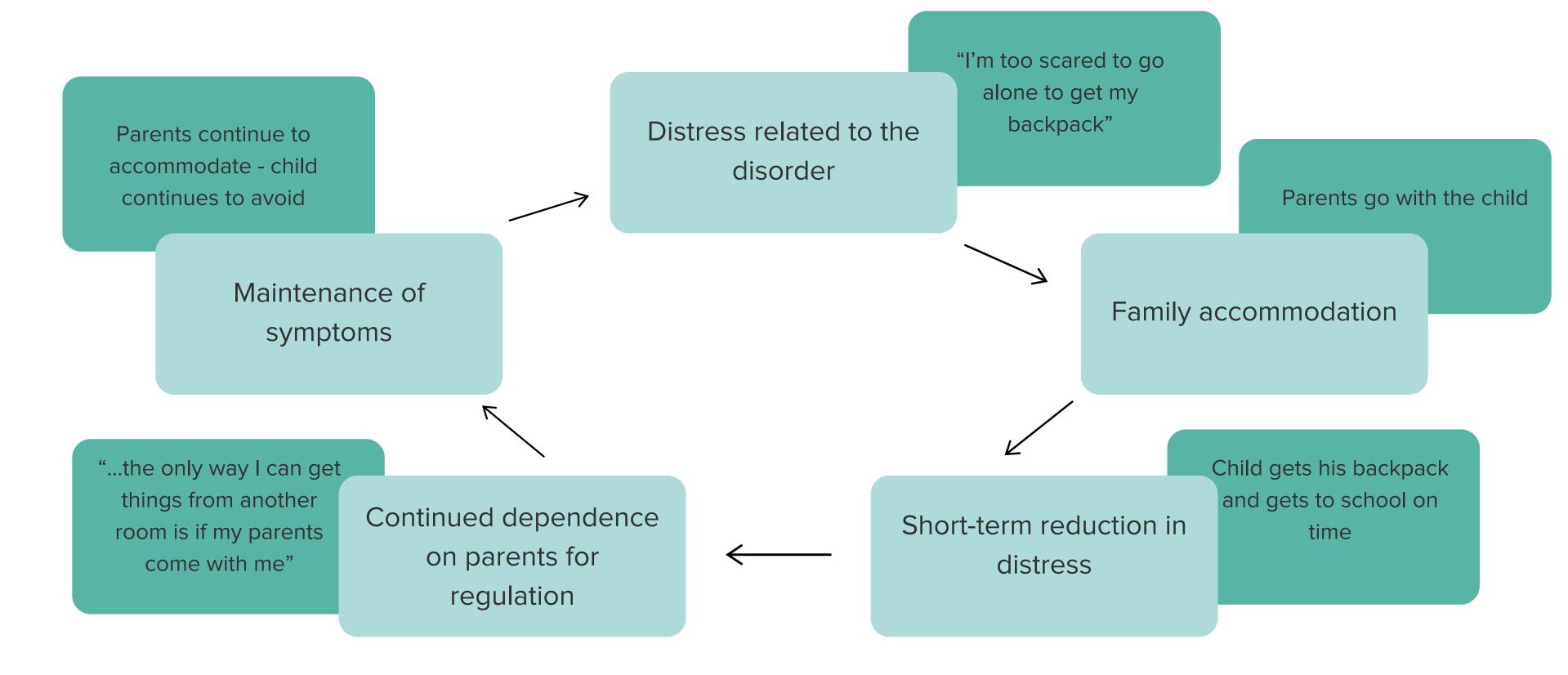
#### How does your family respond to your child's anxiety?



- How much of your time is taken over by your child's fear?
- What are you doing differently for this child, compared to his/her siblings?
- What would you do differently if your child was not anxious or afraid?



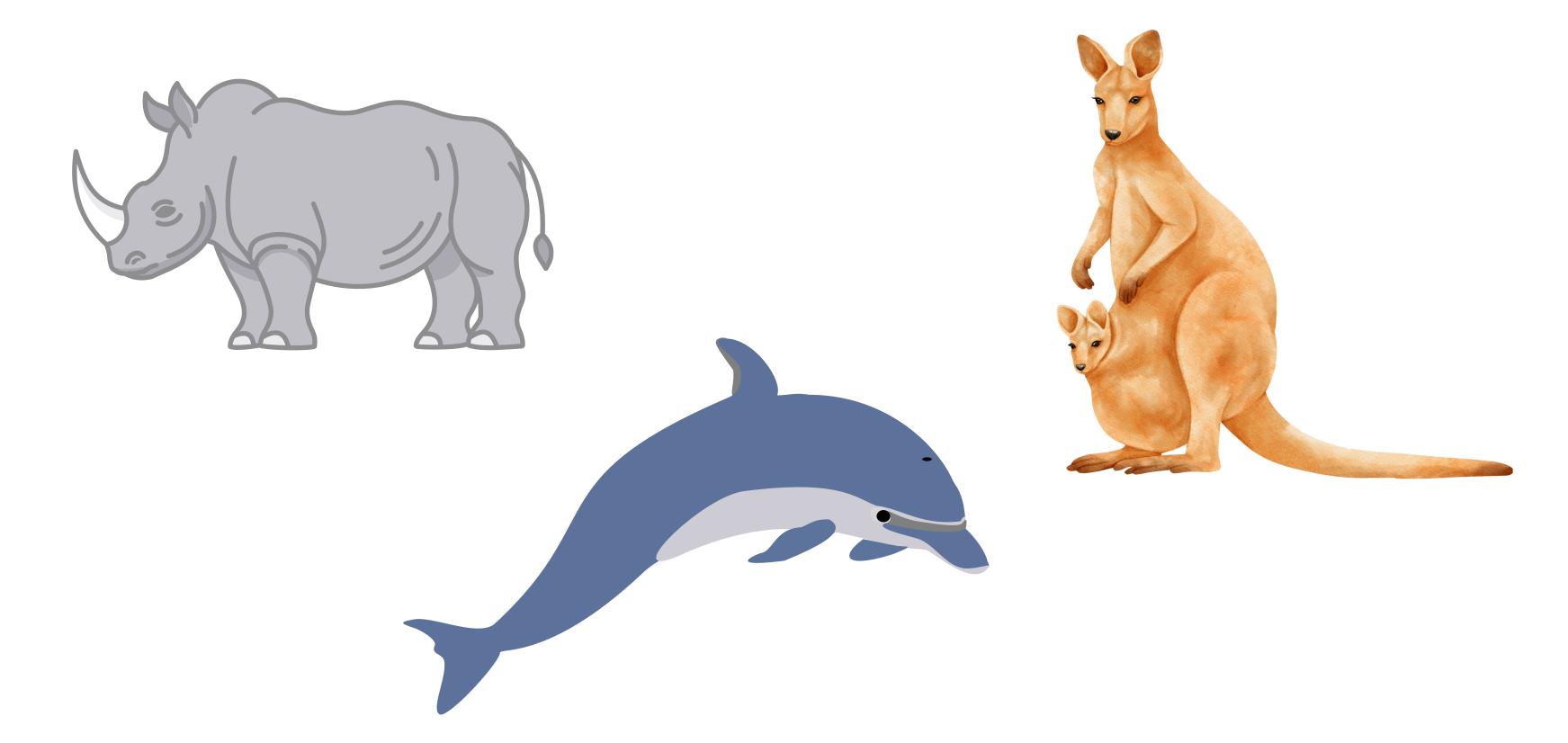
#### Accommodation Cycle







### The Supportive Stance







#### Move from reactive to receptive

- Validate their emotion 'I am wondering if you are feeling anxious right now?'
- Keep language brief
- Non-verbal communication is key eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, posture, timing, intensity
- Avoid statements such as 'calm down'; 'don't be so silly'
- Grounding / anchoring 5 senses, soles of the feet, butterfly hug, rolling a pencil







#### Starting with yourself

- Recognise your own reactivity / receptivity be present and kind to your own experience
- Be aware of your need to get rid of or control their (and your) anxiety
- Modelling emotional awareness by naming emotions for you – 'I am feeling a little nervous right now'
- Preparing the child or young person when possible
- Promote the benefits of anxiety







#### We need to act in their best





Think of your child as having many inner voices; some of the voices represent the fear and anxiety, and right now these may be clamouring the most loudly so that only they are heard.

But consider that there are other voices inside as well.

Voices that represent the child's will to be able to cope more, to be free to do more things or feel more comfortable.

By acting independently of what the child is saying right now, you are aligning yourself with those voices and giving him or her your support.





#### The Foundations

- Sleep
- Diet sugar, caffeine?
- Screen time
- Pain / physical illness
- Exercise
- Mood enhancing substances?
- Addressing underlying causes e.g. bullying







#### Strategies

- Problem-solving together "anything else?"
- Externalising anxiety mindfulness of emotions in the body
- Soothing touch
- Worry Tree
- Worry Time
- Defusion







#### Strategies

- Graded exposure the ladder approach
- Breathing techniques 7/11 and Belly breathing
- Progressive muscular relaxation
- Reward achievements and effort / celebrate success
- Kind self-talk
- HEDYDT? How exactly did you do that?
- If / then plans

