



The Known Unknown: Managing Intensities during the Pandemic

Matthew J. Zakreski, PsyD

Who am I?

Dr. Matt Zakreski – clinical psychologist and advocate

Grown-up gifted kid

Managed to raise and have a kid during the pandemic

Goals for today

Learn about

Learn about anxiety and its impact on our brains and bodies

Review

Learn about our body's systems for regulating anxiety

Understand

Learn about what over-excitabilities are and how they manifest

Develop

Develop strategies for managing anxiety with your own neurodiversity in mind

Everyone has Anxiety sometimes

It is a normal emotion
that has significant
adaptive qualities





It's
Different
for
everyone

What is Anxiety?



A feeling of dread or uneasiness



It might cause you to sweat, feel restless and tense, and have a rapid heartbeat.



Evolutionary advantage



For most people, the feelings are moderate and temporary

Two primary types



What is an Anxiety Disorder?

- ♦ Anxiety disorders are conditions in which you have **anxiety that does not go away and can get worse over time**. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, schoolwork, and relationships.
- ♦ Anxiety Disorders can lead to:
 - ♦ Anxious thoughts or beliefs that are hard to control. They make you feel restless and tense and interfere with your daily life. They do not go away and can get worse over time.
 - ♦ Physical symptoms, such as a pounding or rapid heartbeat, unexplained aches and pains, feeling dizzy, and shortness of breath
 - ♦ Changes in behavior, such as avoiding everyday activities you used to do/enjoy
 - ♦ Maladaptive coping – developing rituals, becoming over-involved with others, having meltdowns

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Social Anxiety Disorder (aka Social Phobia)

Panic Attacks / Panic Disorder

Phobias

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Maladaptive Perfectionism

HOW **STRESS** & **ANXIETY** AFFECTS YOUR BODY

BRAIN

Difficulty concentrating, anxiety, depression, irritability, mood, mind fog

CARDIOVASCULAR

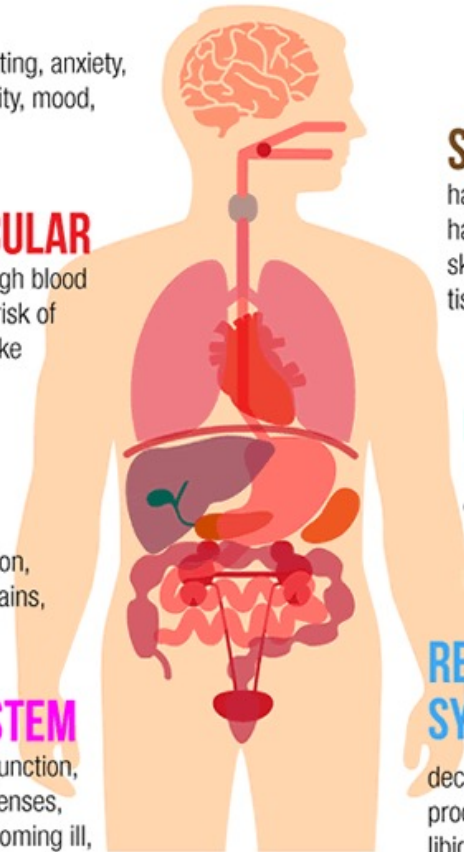
higher cholesterol, high blood pressure, increased risk of heart attack and stroke

JOINTS AND MUSCLES

increased inflammation, tension, aches and pains, muscle tightness

IMMUNE SYSTEM

decreased immune function, lowered immune defenses, increased risk of becoming ill, increase in recovery time



SKIN

hair loss, dull/brittle hair, brittle nails, dry skin, acne, delayed tissue repair

GUT

nutrient absorption, diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, bloating, pain and discomfort

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

decreased hormone production, decrease in libido, increase in PMS symptoms

Where does Anxiety Come From?

Nature – high genetic component (like intelligence)

Early childhood distress

Nurture – parenting styles, goodness of fit with environment, exposure

Epigenetics – our bodies change as a result of what we are exposed to in the world (positively and negatively)

Trauma

Relationship with intelligence?





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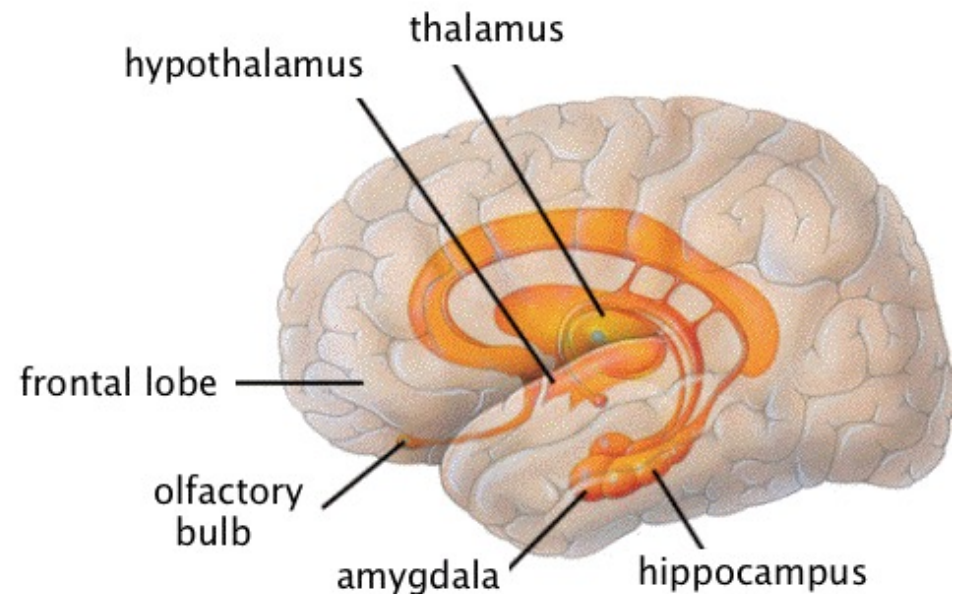
Anxiety Test

- Our thoughts come into our head unbidden
- Can we stop them?
- Can we change the relationship with them?
- Example



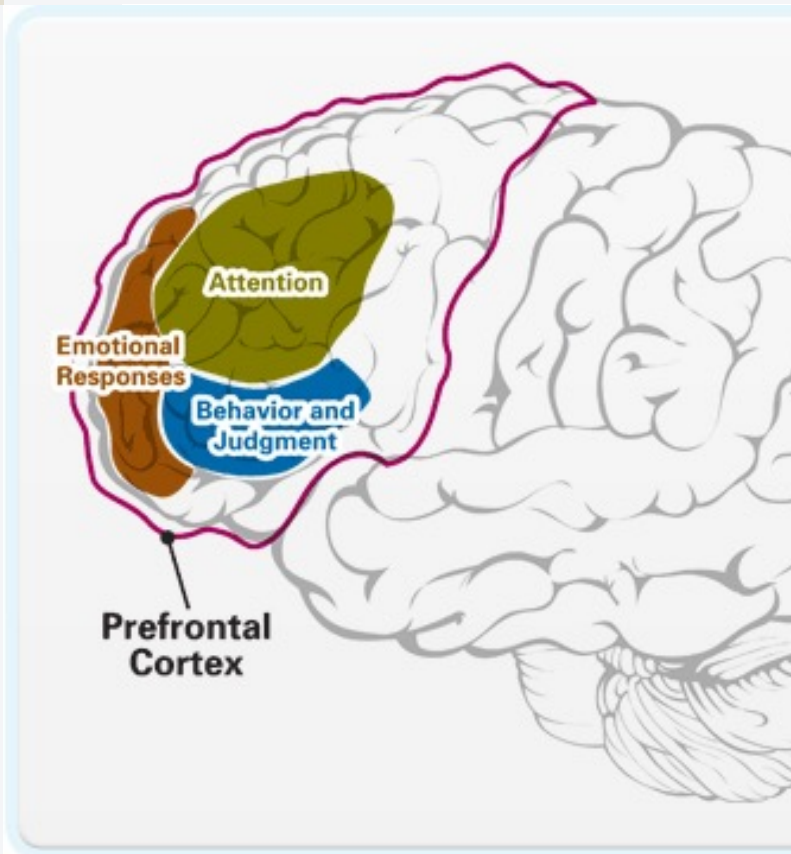
Neuropsychology background

- The emotional control system in the brain is the Limbic System
 - Hypothalamus – relay system
 - Hippocampus – memory
 - Amygdala – fear and anger responses to stimuli
 - Limbic cortex – two structures that impact judgement, mood, and motivation
- Gifted brains are more “wired” with interconnecting neurons.
- The system that is responsible for regulating our behavioral responses is the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC), which matures later in the gifted brain
- Big feelings = Big behaviors



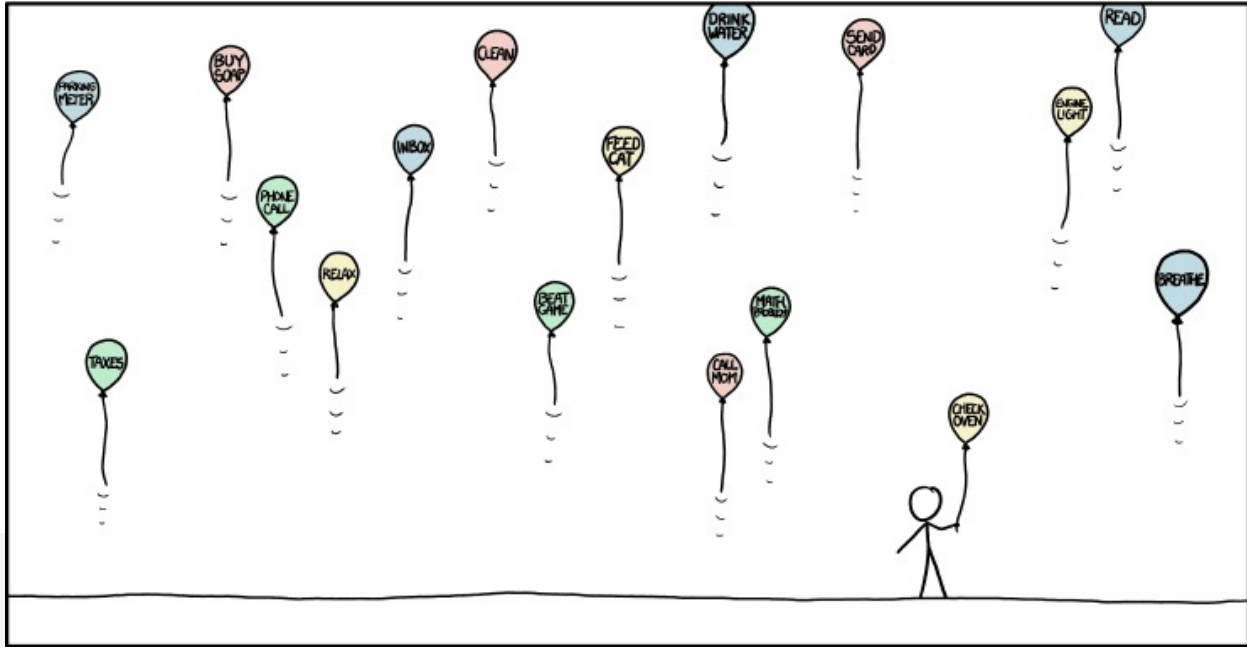
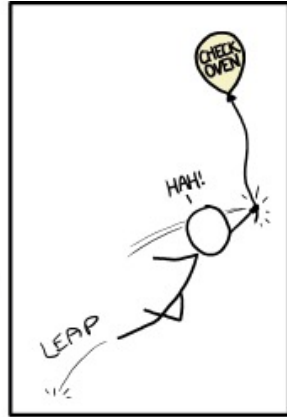
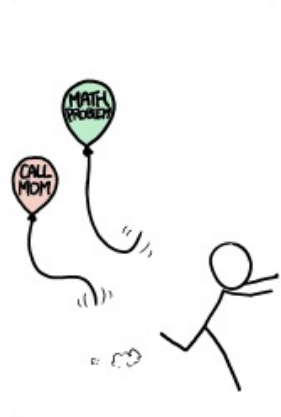
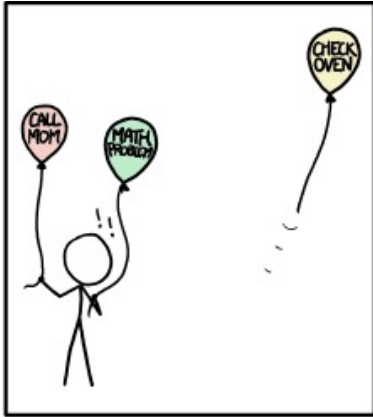
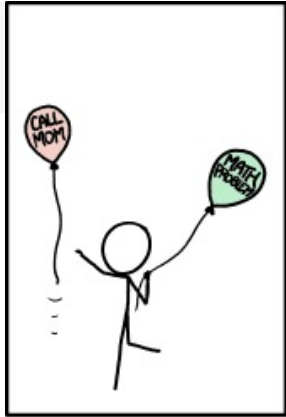
Case in point

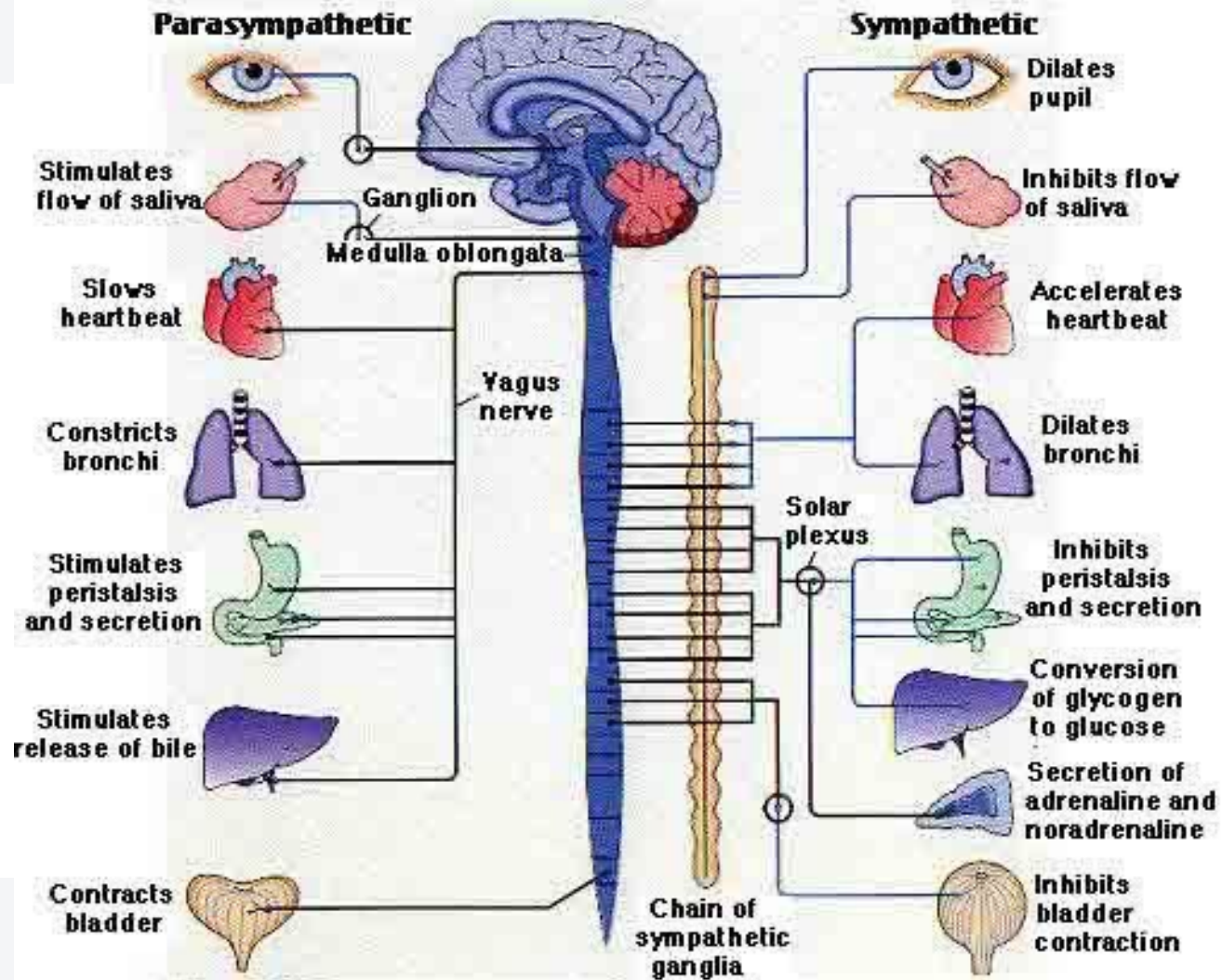




Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)

- Located in the Frontal Lobe
- Executive Functioning Skills
 - Planning
 - Follow through
 - Task initiation/completion
 - Self-regulation (emotional)
 - Time management
 - Attention
- Behavioral Inhibition





The secret

- Our brains and bodies WANT to return to homeostasis
- The brain needs to have a request to engage the parasympathetic nervous system
- The code is “I’m feeling _____”
- Must be spoken OUT LOUD





The research is mixed as to whether gifted people experience MORE anxiety



When it is experienced – major capacity to be more intense, longer-lasting, and more frequency



Intelligence correlates with

Self-doubt
Over-thinking
Perfectionism
Existential dread



Anxiety SOUNDS logical; it isn't – can the student understand that?

What about Gifted Kids?

Overexcitabilities

- Based on the work of Dabrowski (1976)
- Areas of the brain that are “overly wired” neurologically – inborn, heightened abilities to receive and respond to stimuli
- Expressed as increased sensitivity, awareness, and intensity
- Five areas
 - Psychomotor
 - Emotional
 - Imaginational
 - Intellectual
 - Sensory



Psychomotor OE

- ♦ Boundless verbal and physical energy – “the love of movement for the sake of movement”
- ♦ Lack of perspective as to why everyone else doesn’t have their energy, enthusiasm, intrinsic motivation
 - ♦ Can come across as obnoxious
 - ♦ Can be misdiagnosed as ADHD
- ♦ What to do
 - ♦ Build in activity to the day
 - ♦ Scheduled “microbreaks”
 - ♦ Set expectations of people in their lives
 - ♦ Be creative (at home and at school)





Emotional OE

“A gifted child can get their feelings catastrophically hurt in situations where most people wouldn’t even have feelings.”
– Josh Shaine

Heightened, intense feelings for self and others

Can lead to conflict in interpersonal relationships

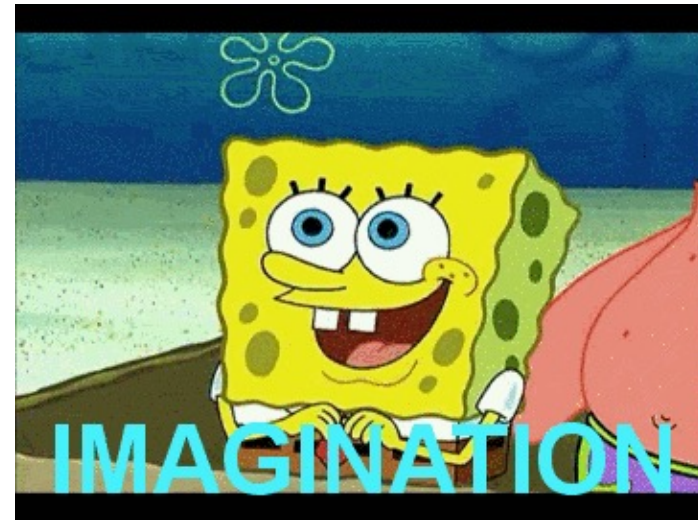
“Sense of Justice”

What to do?

- 1) Accept and acknowledge emotions
- 2) Self-regulation techniques (arch back, name feeling, deep breathing)
- 3) Understanding and anticipate emotions

Imaginational OE

- More active and engaged imagination marked by elaborate fantasy, use of imagery/metaphor, and facility for invention
- May mix truth with fiction – embellishing what happened
- Escaping boredom – but at what cost?
- Watch out for “the rabbit hole”
- What to do
 - Embellishing = anxiety management strategy
 - Practice when to imagine
 - Mindfulness = being present isn’t so bad



Intellectual OE

- A marked need to seek knowledge and understand information
- Incredibly active minds – seek and create challenges for the satisfaction of problem solving (but the follow through...)
- Can be very impatient with those who do not match their level of thought or interest in a topic
- What to do
 - We teach **how** to learn
 - Independent studies
 - Focus on the actions you can take
 - Practice group work – what roles?



Sensory OE

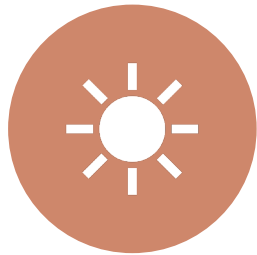
- ♦ Heightened experience or sensory pleasure or displeasure from sensory input (smell, taste, touch, etc.)
- ♦ Easily overwhelmed and distracted by sensory input
- ♦ May dramatically seek out or avoid being the center of attention
- ♦ What to do
 - ♦ What areas are overstimulating?
 - ♦ What sensory inputs give pleasure?
 - ♦ Start with clothes and food
 - ♦ Watch out for bathrooms!!!



So what do
we do?



Self-care!



WELL, DUH



WHAT WORKS FOR
YOU?



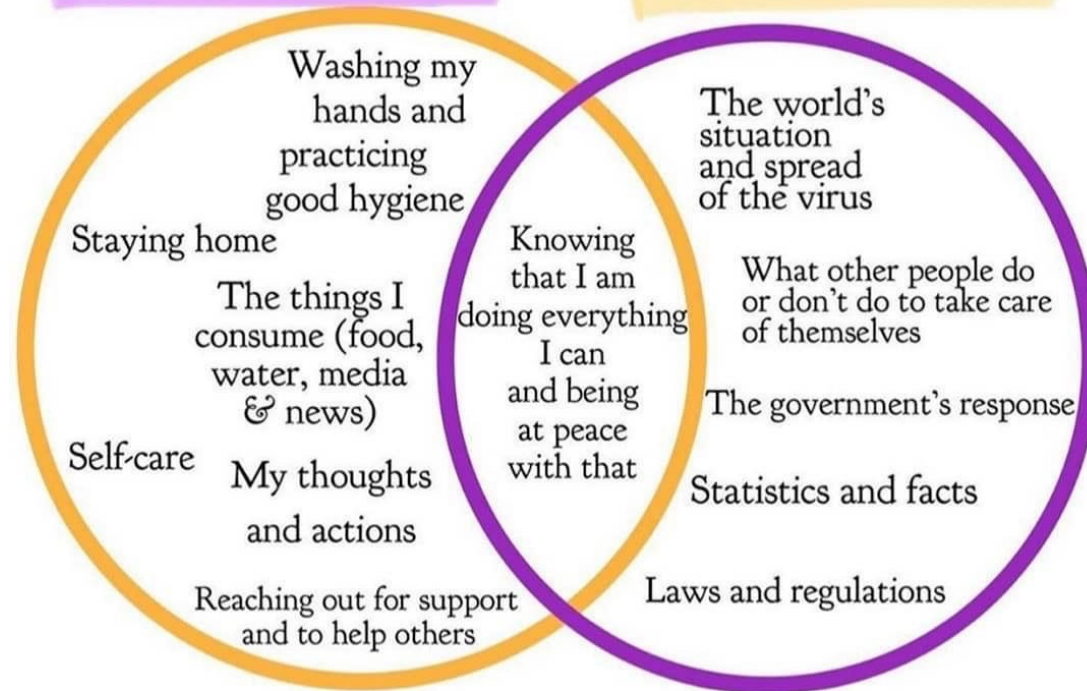
SCHEDULING
TIME/SPACE FOR IT

Identifying and Expressing Emotion

- ♦ What brings you joy? Do that first!
- ♦ Specific and authentic praise
- ♦ Develop a common vocabulary around emotions
- ♦ Pay attention to your body – it gives cues and clues to your emotions
- ♦ What are your triggers? Dislikes? Cringe moments? Know them and be aware of them
- ♦ Be proactive and strategic

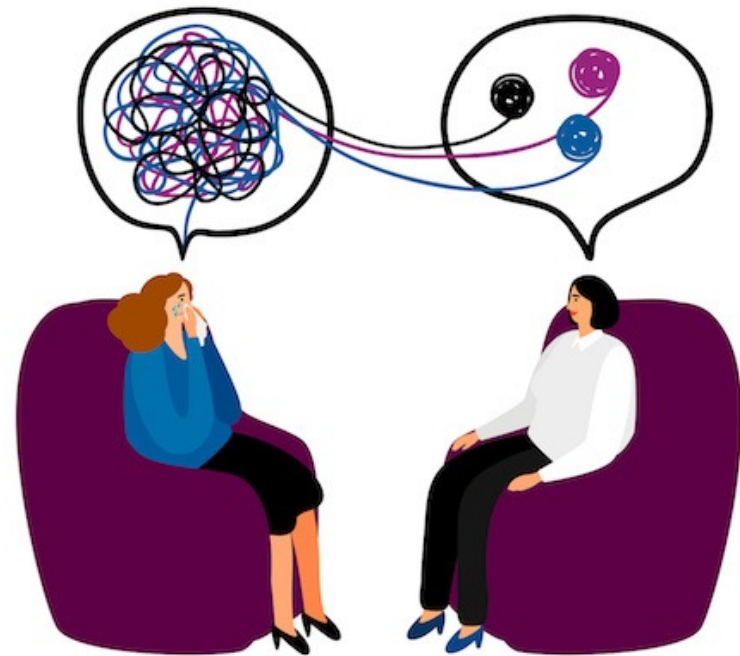
THINGS I CAN CONTROL

THINGS I CAN'T CONTROL




How to make therapy work for you

- Interview your therapist – what style(s) do you want? Hate? What will make this work for you?
- Do you want to meet in person? Online?
- What about homework?
- How can you be vulnerable?
- To what extent do you want your parents/teachers involved?
- Medication



My rule

You are allowed to feel **HOWEVER**
you want to feel about **ANYTHING**.

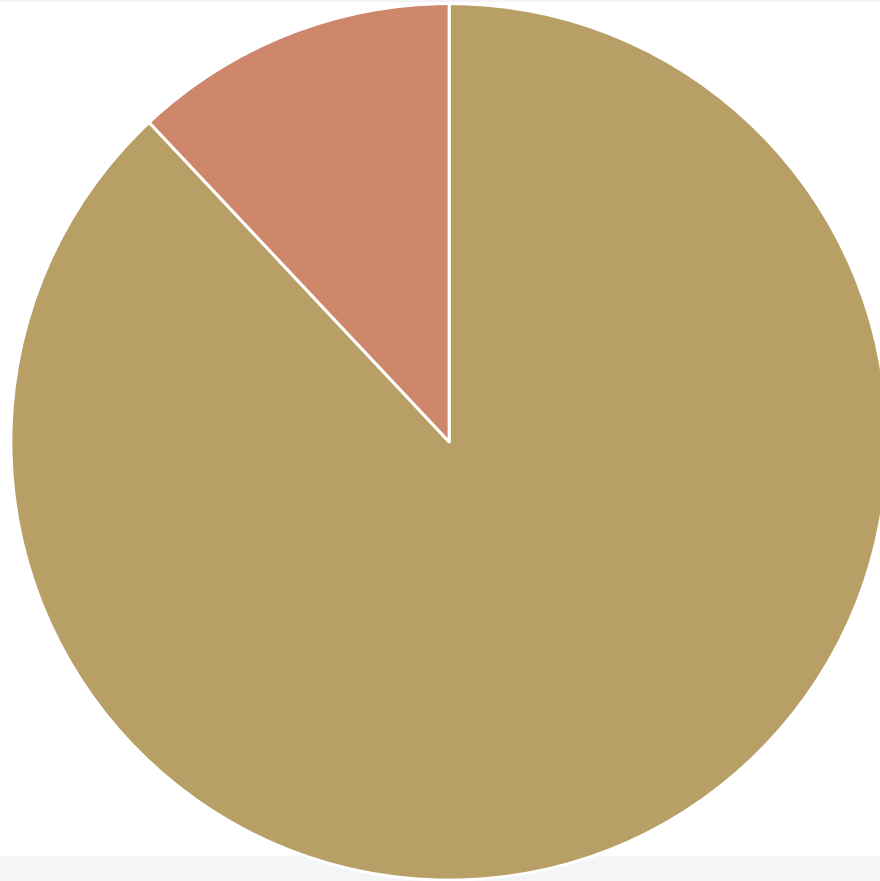


But it's what you **DO** with
those feelings that matter.

Important Video



Your Chosen Area



■ Item A ■ Item B

More resources

- ♦ <https://greatist.com/grow/what-you-can-control-for-happiness-success>
- ♦ <https://www.thebeautifulifeplan.com/blog/20-things-you-cant-control-vs-20-things-you-can-and-how-to-let-go-of-control>
- ♦ <https://selecthealth.org/blog/2019/05/why-you-need-to-make-time-for-self-care>
- ♦ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/start-a-self-care-routine/>
- ♦ <https://www.sengifted.org/post/hellinger-overexcitabilities>
- ♦ <https://laconciergepsychologist.com/blog/how-to-manage-overexcitability-in-gifted-teens/>
- ♦ <https://educationaladvancement.org/blog-15-strategies-for-managing-your-gifted-childs-intensities/>

Questions?

- You can find me at www.drmattzakreski.com
- You can follow me at www.facebook.com/drmattzakreski
- You can email me at drmattzakreski@gmail.com