

How to Help Children and Teens Be Set Up for Resilience during A Divorce

~ Sharon Selby, B.Ed, M.A, Registered Clinical Counsellor

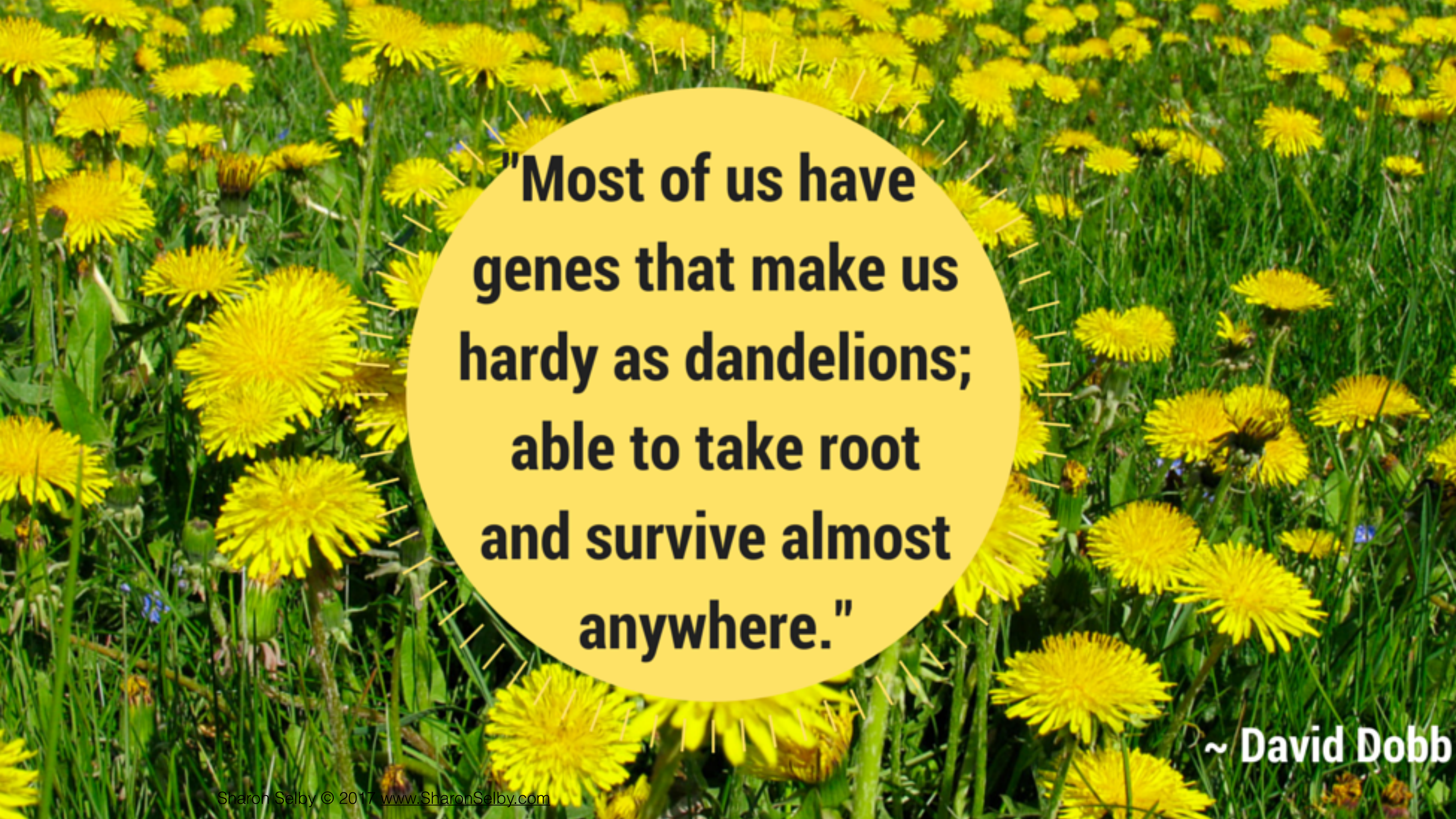
www.SharonSelby.com





**Emotional Resiliency is the ability to
bounce back emotionally, after
experiencing distress.**



A vibrant field of yellow dandelions in full bloom, set against a lush green background. A large, semi-transparent yellow circle is centered in the image, containing a quote in bold black text. The circle's edge is decorated with small, white, vertical lines that resemble the seeds of a dandelion.

**"Most of us have
genes that make us
hardy as dandelions;
able to take root
and survive almost
anywhere."**

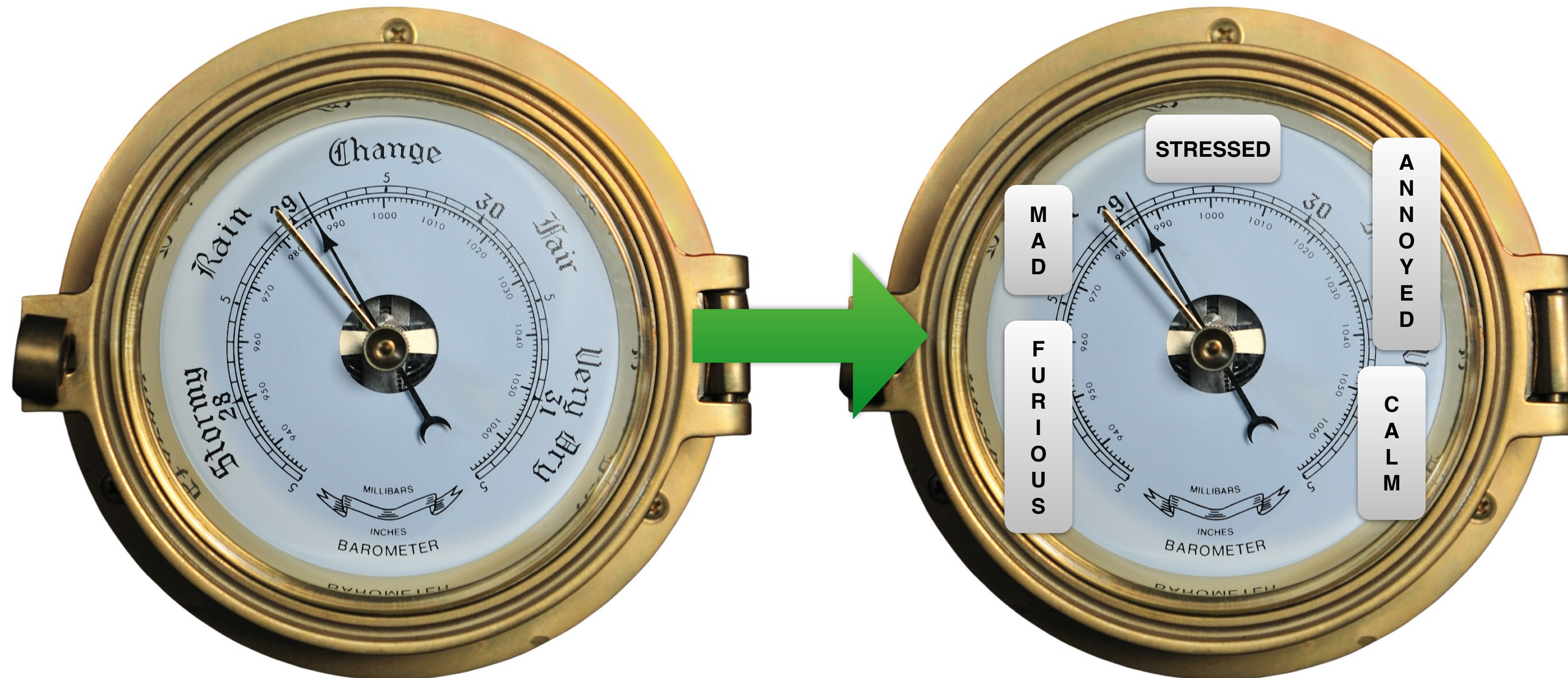
~ David Dobb

**“A few of us, however,
are more like the
orchid: fragile and
fickle, but capable of
blooming
spectacularly if given
greenhouse care.”**

~ David Dobb



Sensitive Children = Emotional Barometers



Unconsciously, they measure the
“atmospheric pressure” in the room = $\uparrow$ Anxiety



Sensitive, Stressed-Out Children = Overactive Smoke Detectors



STRESS



My Observations from over 28 years of being a mental health practitioner:

↑ **Anxiety**

↑ **Depression**

↑ **Self-harm**

↓ **Resilience**

Before smart phones, youth, in general, could:

- Make a phone call
- Answer a phone call
- Take a public bus independently
- Handwrite thank you cards and mail them
- Climb a tree
- Tell the time on an analog clock
- Sew on a button
- Introduce someone in-person
- End a relationship in-person
- Have a hobby
- Enjoy getting books out of the library
- Make new friends when in a new setting
- Solve a problem on their own
- Cook basic meals

After smart phones, youth generally prefer to:

- Text
- Ignore and wait for text
- Use a ride app to order a drive
- Text (if it happens)
- Stay indoors on a screen
- Use digital time on phone
- Buy new clothes online
- Introduce by adding someone to Snapchat etc.
- Break up over text
- Watch shows on streaming devices
- Watch short-form videos
- Stand in a group or off to the side while on phone
- Text parents for help or rescuing
- Order food to their door



What Are Some of the Reasons That Kids Are Less Resilient Today?

- **Parents today are more connected and protective (don't want their child to experience unpleasant thoughts and feelings)**
- **Parents today are more likely to get involved about their children's affairs - letter grades, not being invited to a birthday party, another child saying mean words to their child, etc.**
- **Pressure to “succeed” (over scheduled) or be “beautiful” (social media)**
- **Video games teach “moral inversion” Eg. Grand Theft Auto**
- **The more time one spends on social media and the more “followers” one has, the more likely one is to become depressed (Kathy Charles, Napier University)**
- **Kids are more peer-oriented (Dr. Gordon Neufeld) and surface-oriented (social media posturing)**



Some of the Reasons Why Social Media Decreases Resilience?

- **Toxic Messaging in the “Manosphere” regarding masculinity, “looksmaxing”, women’s roles**
- **Toxic Messaging for young females regarding extreme thinness and eating disorders, appearance perfectionism and beauty obsession, being a “high ranking woman”, sexualization, mental health romanticization,**
- **External validation becomes overvalued. Self-worth being connected to amount of followers, comments made, who is following you etc.**
- **Fear Mongering video content: Eg. Hantavirus**
- **Constant social comparison, always feeling inferior**
- **Reduced tolerance for discomfort (escape from boredom, distraction from difficult feelings, quick validation when feeling insecure)**



~~Over-Scheduling~~

“Activity without downtime is ultimately – like a plant without roots – unsustainable”

***~ Simplicity Parenting by
Kim John Payne & Lisa Ross***



The pendulum has swung...

- More boundaries
- Less emotional attunement

Need a combination of
being in the middle:
emotional attunement and
boundaries

- More emotional attunement
- Less boundaries



The Rock Parent

(Authoritarian - You do as I say because I said so! Don't cry or I'll give you something to cry about!)



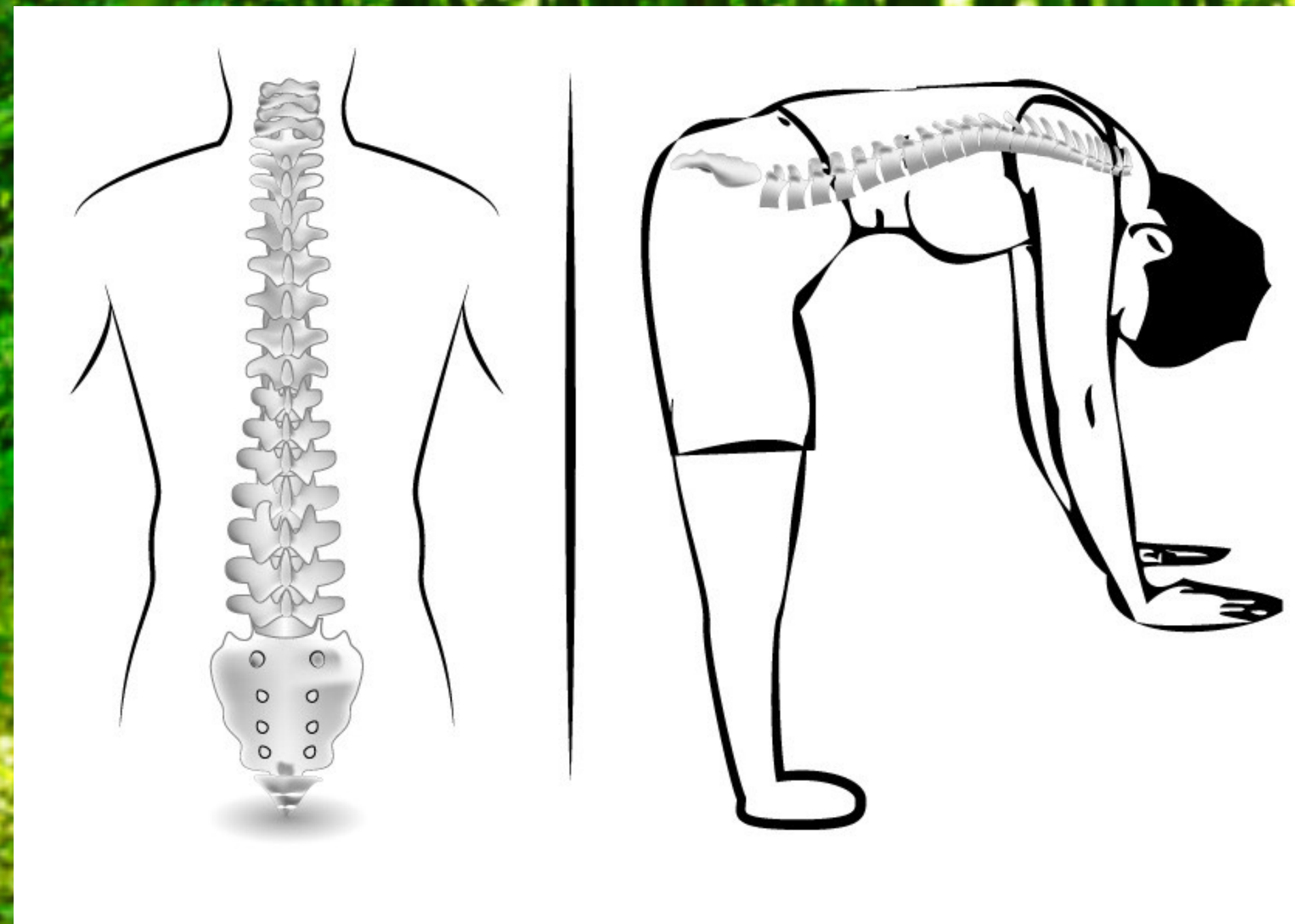
The Jello Parent

Permissive Parenting - Don't want child to experience any distress



The Flexible Bamboo Parent ✓

- Can lean in when emotional attunement is needed ✓
- Can stand firm when boundaries are needed ✓



#1 Message from Dr. Leonard Sax in The Collapse of Parenting

“ The focus has become on what kids do and achieve not on who they are and their character...

We need to teach character, self-control, and conscientiousness...

We need to instil a sense of meaning, a longing for something higher and deeper...

Without meaning, life comes to seem pointless and futile...

Meaning in life - that is not about their latest accomplishment or how they look or how many friends they have but about who your child is, their truest self.”

~ Dr. Leonard Sax



What Do We Want For Our Kids?

The Five 'R's of Developing "R.Q."

- **Rooted**
- **Respected/Respectful**
- **Responsible**
- **Regulated**
- **Risk Takers (calculated)**



1. ROOTED



When a flower
doesn't bloom, you
fix the environment
in which it grows,
not the flower.

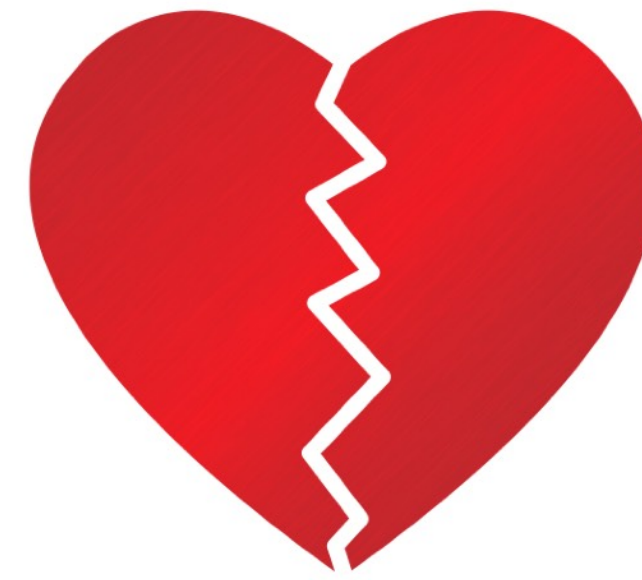
Alexander Den Heijer



Attachment Concerns in Divorce

- Changes in attachment security
- Fear of abandonment
- Emotional safety concerns
- Parental alienation
- Division of loyalty
- Age Developmental Considerations:
 - Younger children, in particular, need frequent attachment contact
 - Teens maybe more affected than they show or share
 - Neurodiverse kids may struggle more with transitions
- How to increase contact when child/teen is living between two homes?
If kids are on an “alternating week with each parent schedule”...
 - Create a mid-week meet up - a dinner?
 - Video call at night time?
- Nesting versus Two Homes with kids moving back and forth

Divided Loyalties



- Parents need to remember: Their child is made up of half of each parent
- When a parent speaks badly about the other parent, the child feels it in their body and in their nervous system
- Even if they are closer to one parent or one parent has mistreated them, they usually still feel an instinctual loyalty
- Parental conflict feels like a war inside the child
- The child needs to feel safe being attached to both parents (when it is safe)

Conflict = Rocking Canoe

- Imagine kid(s) in the middle of a canoe with a parent on each end
- When the waters are calm, the kids in the middle feel safe and secure side sea sickness emotional contagion from parental stress
- When the parents are “rocking the boat”, the kid(s) in the middle get “sea sick” which could be high anxiety, OCD, depression etc.
- Observing tense communication or conflict between parents = rocking the boat

Keys to Preserving Secure Attachment for Kids and Divorced Parents

- Kids do best when they receive truthful but developmentally appropriate explanations for the separation/divorce
- Kids do best when they receive the same messaging - that they are not responsible nor could they have done anything differently
- Kids do best when they feel confident that both parents still love them and understand that the kind of love between a parent and child is different than between parents
- Kids do best when parents act supportive (Eg. Help buy mother's day/father's day card/present for the other parent, attend family celebrations such as child's birthday all together etc.)

A Secure and Close Parent-Child Relationship = A Secure Base

***“Life is best organized as a series of daring ventures from a secure base.”
~John Bowlby, 1988, British Child Psychologist***



A strong foundation supports a solid home

Connection, Connection, Connection



A Secure and Close Parent - Child Relationship = Resilience

Finding things BOTH ENJOY and doing them on a weekly basis!





Promises and Predictability Create Strong Attachment

- Predictability and consistency eases anxiety and builds trust
- Parents keeping their word fosters a sense of security
- Parents prioritizing the schedule and remaining committed to the schedule creates stability

Research, with 26,078 Canadian adolescents, shows that the more families eat together, the...

- **Less likely to have internalizing problems such as feeling sad, anxious or lonely**
- **Less likely to have externalizing problems such as fighting, skipping school, addictive behaviours and stealing**
- **More the child feels connected to family vs. peers**
- **Time spent eating together creates an Alpha ritual**

Source: The Collapse of Parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax



Attachment versus Authenticity

~ Dr. Gabor Maté

We have two primary needs: Attachment and Authenticity

- We need attachment when we're younger to survive. We depend on caregivers to meet our needs.
- If we're not able to express emotions authentically, for example, we're not allowed to be angry, we will suppress our emotions and hide our authenticity in favour of attachment. There needs to be emotional safety.
- If there's no emotional safety, it impacts the parent-child relationship and later our young adult child might choose authenticity over attachment and distance themselves from the parent(s)



Plan a vacation where there will be...

- **No phones and no devices! (a no wifi destination works best)**
- **Activities that all the family members can enjoy**
- **An opportunity for the kids to depend on their parent (ie. new surroundings, new language, new culture, a hike in the bush)**
- **A sense of fulfillment without filling up on social media, video games etc.**
- **Board games, card games, scavenger hunts etc.**



Connected to Extended Family, Circles and Groups

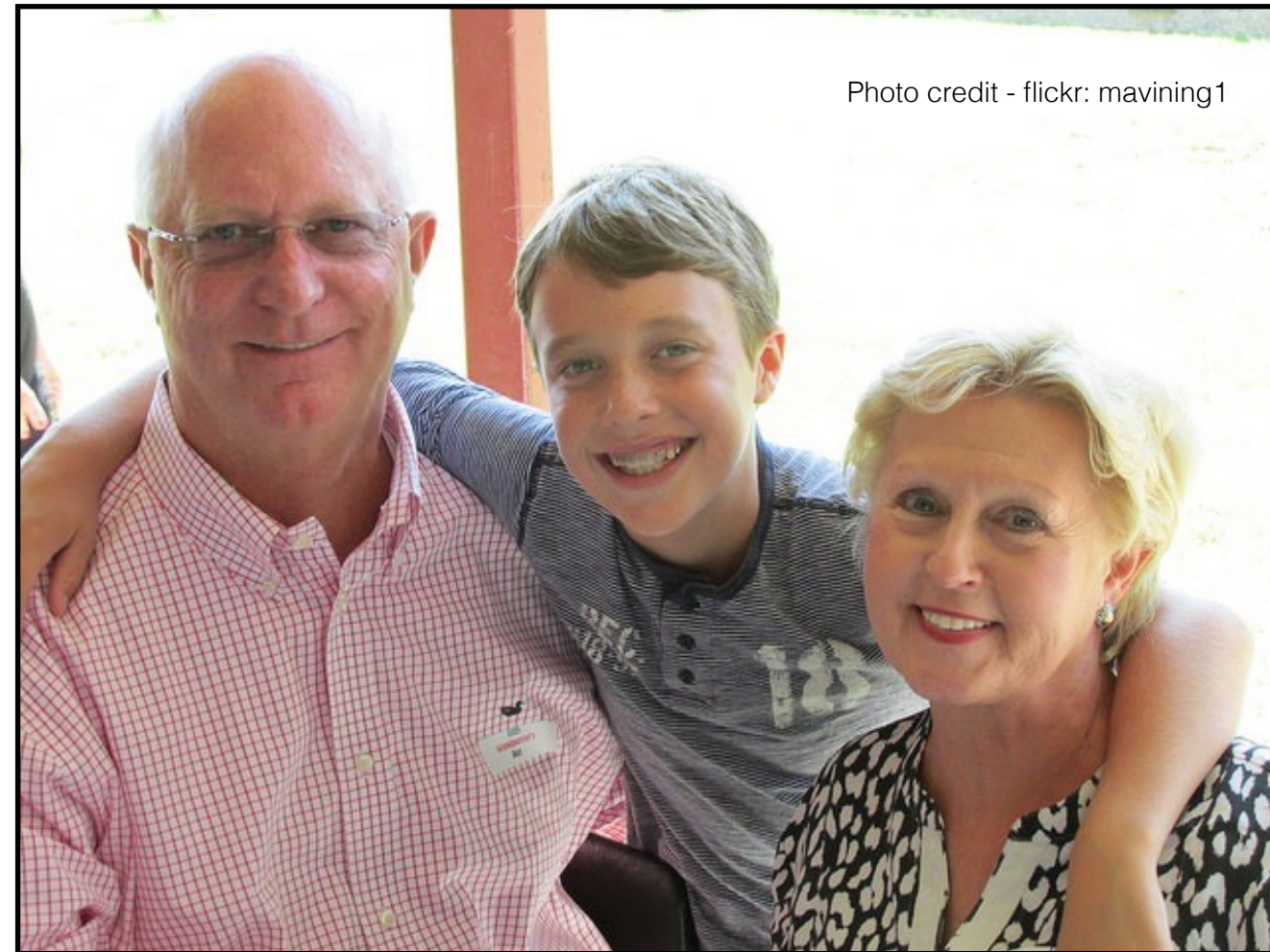


Photo credit - flickr: mavining1



Photo credit - flickr: Shona Watanabe



Photo credit- flickr:KG sand soccer



Photo credit - flickr: Mike Babcock



- Set limits on screens or they will take over
- Screens are the #1 competitor for attachment between parent and child!
- Delay age of screen-usage and social media apps. for as long as possible.
- Sign the UnpluggedCanada.com pledge to delay smart phone use until age 14



Photo credit: flickr.com
Lars Plougmann at the computer



#1 Recommendation: Creating a Family Media Plan for Screens

Editable template available inside my free e-Book at www.sharonsselby.com:

The Screen-Sense Toolkit

*~ For Parents and Professionals Guiding
Child and Youth Digital Health*

- Editable Template for a Family Media Plan
- Screen Use Recommendations
- Screening Questions for Problematic Screen-Use
- Tablets versus Television
- My Concerns about Smart Watches
- A Quick Guide to Social Media
- Recommended Resources
- Healthy Tech Habits



By Sharon Selby, MA, Registered Clinical Counsellor
www.sharonsselby.com



***“We can’t have access to our child’s mind,
Until we have access to our child’s heart”***

~ Dr. Gordon Neufeld



**We all have Mama Bear and
Papa Bear instincts to protect
our kids...**

but we need to...

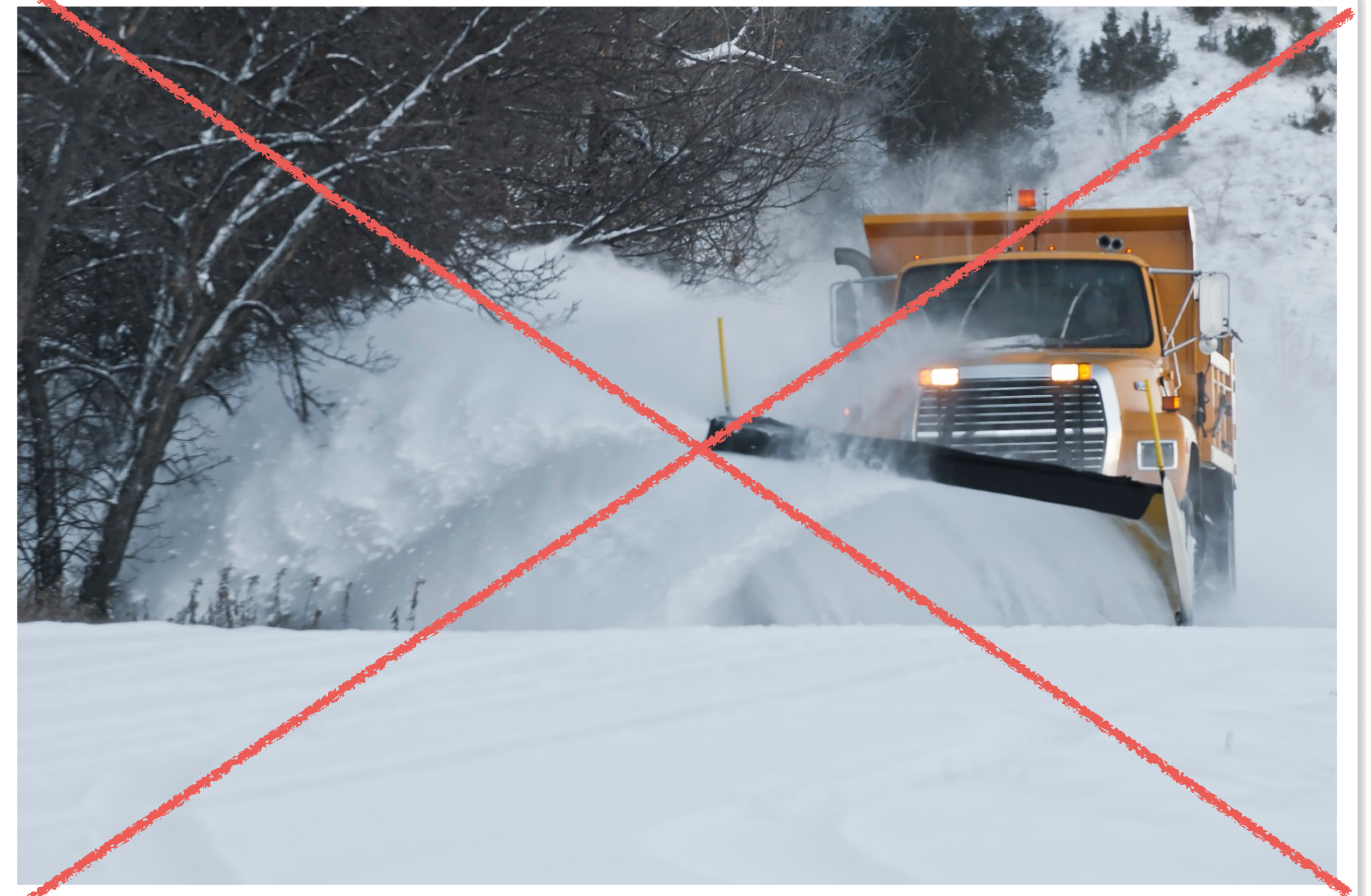
support and coach

Versus

rescue and control



Helicoptering and Rescuing Decreases Resilience



A child's well-being is not negotiable...



Nutrition and Exercise



Sleep



Screen-Time Limits

- **Children need to eat well-balanced meals from all the four good groups**
- **Children need to exercise (CPS recommends 60 minutes/day)**
- **Children need to get enough sleep (pre-school to Kindergarten ~ 11hrs. Grade 1- 7 ~ 10 hrs. Teens ~ 9 hrs.)**

***These are the minimum recommendations for sleep**

Source: The Collapse of Parenting, Dr. Leonard Sax



2. RESPECTED/RESPECTFUL





Today's kids...

**Regular
voice**

Polite

Nice tone

Patient

**Calm, neutral
voice**

Respectful

Connection

Appreciative



Teeter totter parent pleasing

Trying to balance both parents



Interrogation about other
parent
Blaming other parent
Criticizing other parent
Stonewalling other parent

Interrogation about other
parent
Blaming other parent
Criticizing other parent
Stonewalling other parent

Respected = Respectful



What does the child see?
What does the parent's reflection teach?
Does the child feel emotionally safe with each parent so they can share vulnerable feelings?



**Going through hard times, being able to cry about it, and then move forward,
with loving support - this is the recipe for resilience.**

~ Dr. Laura Markham



**“Get curious...
Not furious!”**



Respected - Validated

**“Feelings First
Logics Last”**

~ Sharon Selby



“Empathy is the foundation of parenting” ~ John Gottman





Mad to Sad

~ Dr. Gordon Neufeld



Setting Limits

SUPPORT
EMPATHY
TRUTH

Credit: J. Kreisman & H. Straus



3. Responsible = Response + Able to Solve Problems

Ask what they've tried so far? (versus jumping in with solutions)



Teach responsibility by modelling responsibility

Repair = Re-pair

Damage = Repair

Physical
Hurt

Emotional
Hurt



Figure out how to make amends



Mistakes are an opportunity to learn



“What did you fail at this week?” ~ Question of the week by Sara Blakely’s father



Response - Able



No problem is so big, it can't be solved. Parents need to scaffold not rescue.



**Promote
responsibility by
giving
responsibility**

**Return responsibility
to the child**

**Having regular chores is very
important - builds capability**



**Receive Sharon's free
E-guide on:
Age-Appropriate Life Skills
and Encouragement
Phrases
for your
2 year old - 18 year old
www.sharonSelby.com**



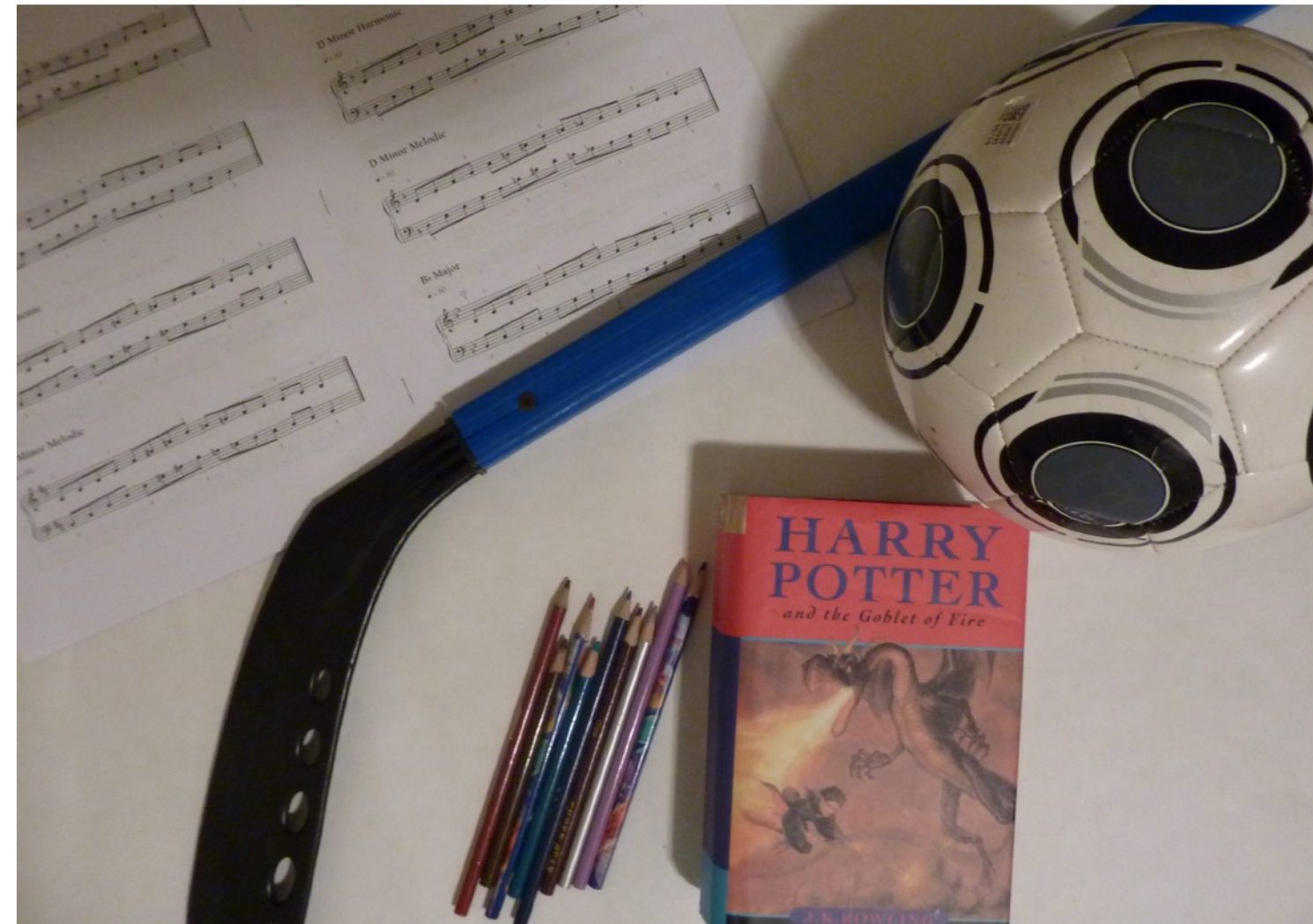
Building Capability through Age-Appropriate Life Skills and Specific Words of Encouragement

Building capability builds confidence. This e-book covers toddlers to teens and gives recommendations for the life skills they need to master, as well as many examples of encouraging phrases that you can use with them.

ACCESS THIS FREE EBOOK



Feel Capable and Responsible ➡ Mastery Connected to a Passion



If we allow our children to play games that reinforce and teach disrespect, how can we expect our kids to be respectful in real life?

Use www.common sense media.org to check everything...

video games, movies, apps. TV, books etc.



Teach and Model Values

- **Honesty**
- **Self-Regulation (Impulse Control)**
- **Humility**
- **Gratitude**
- **Empathy**



How to Teach Child Values & Virtues?

- Chores!!!
- Aesop's Fables or other stories (Buddha at Bedtime)
- Thank you cards, Apology cards/pictures
- Volunteer work
- Role modelling
- Delayed Gratification
- Stick to the age requirements for social media (13+)
- Conversations (at dinner, outings, car rides) about values

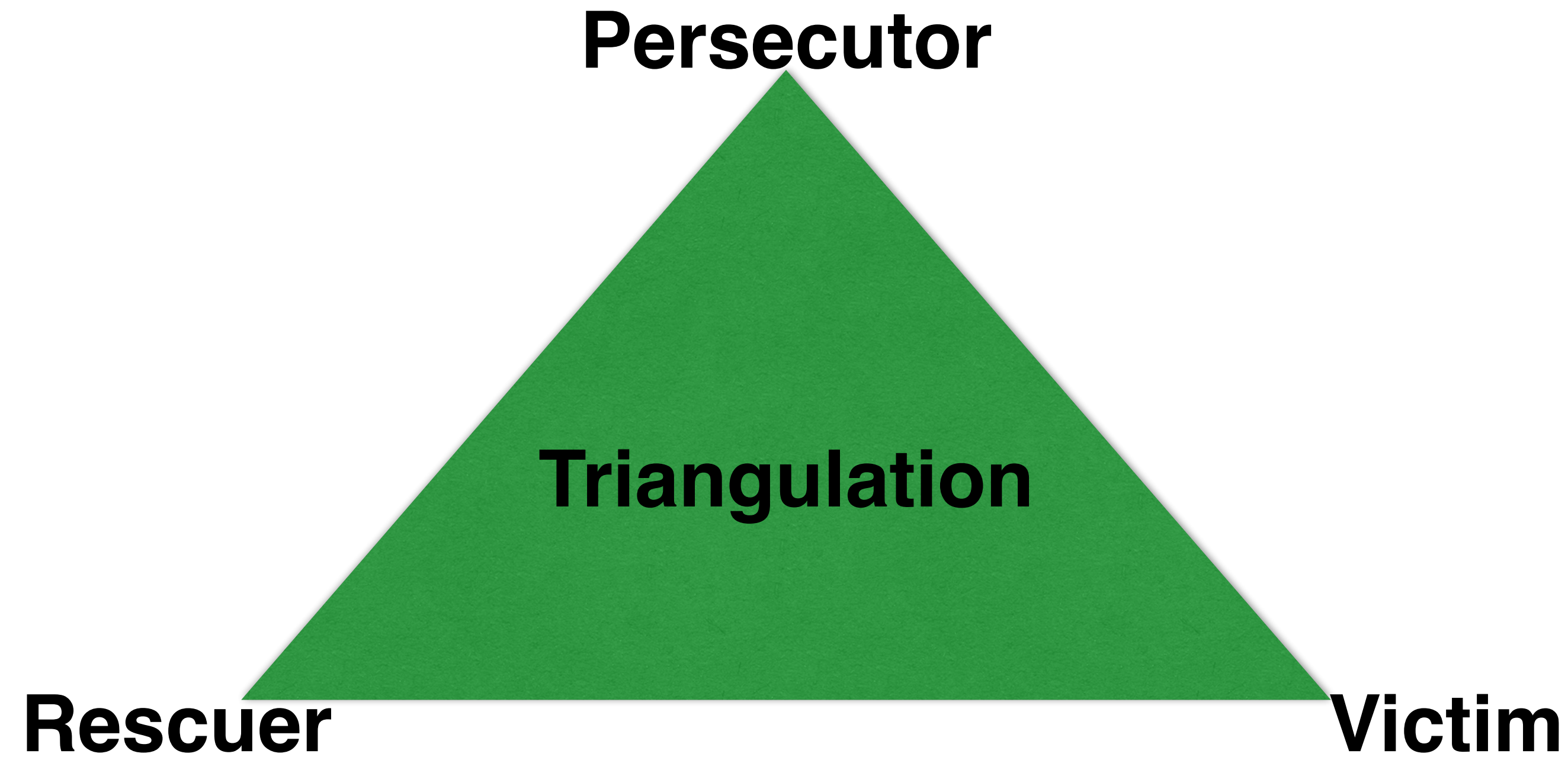


4. Regulation = Distress Tolerance

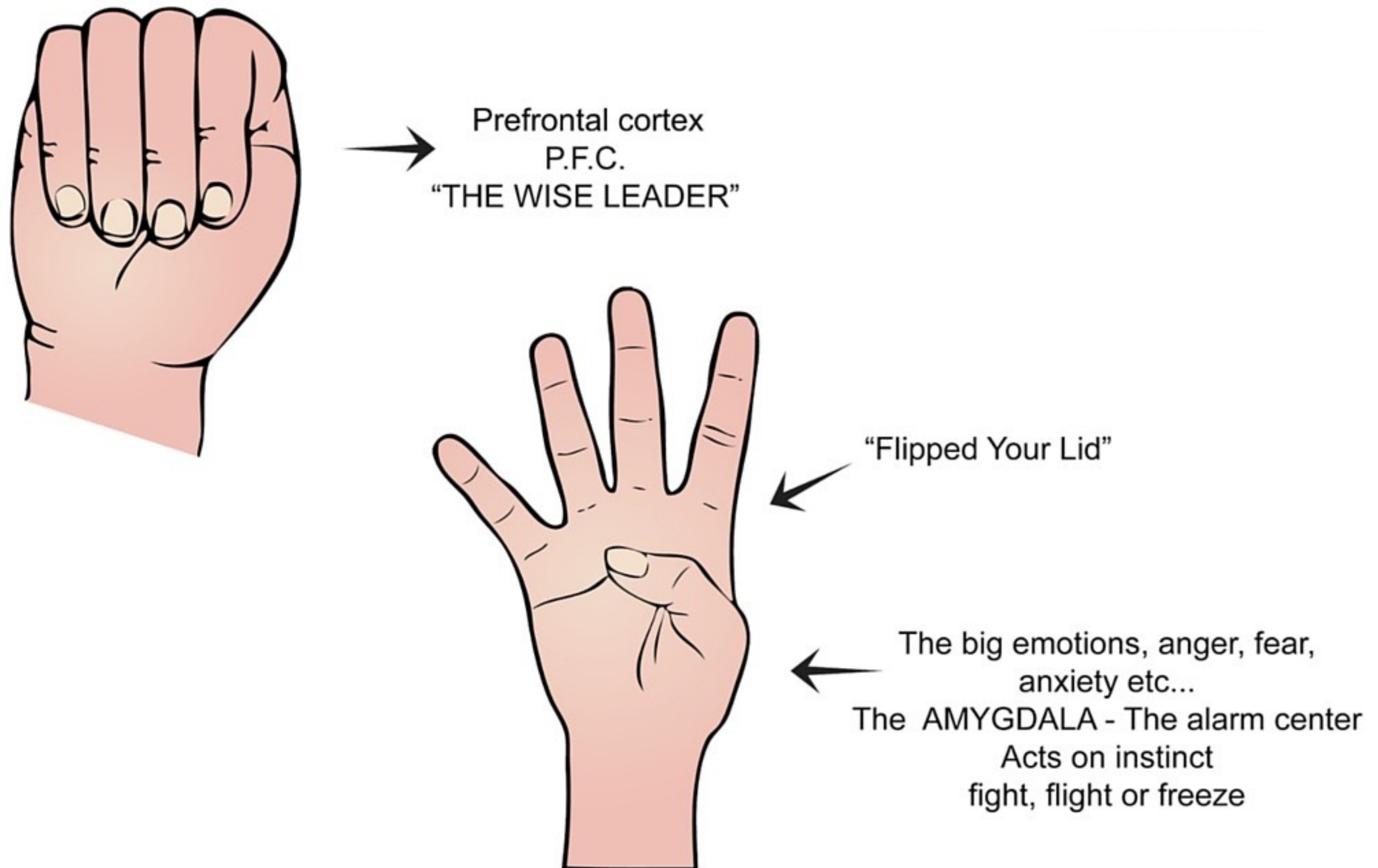
Being **ABLE** to surf big feelings
and impulses



The Parentified Child



- The child feels responsible for making sure the parent is happy
- The parent emotionally unloads onto the child
- The parent takes on a victim mindset and role



Adapted from Dr. Daniel J. Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain found in *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (Bantam Books, 2010)



The “Worry Imp” or Worry Voice of anxiety takes away the power to be resilient.

It is really important to teach children, from a young age, about the worry voice and how it plays tricks on us.



Worry versus Trust



“Supposing a tree fell down, Pooh,
when we were underneath it?”

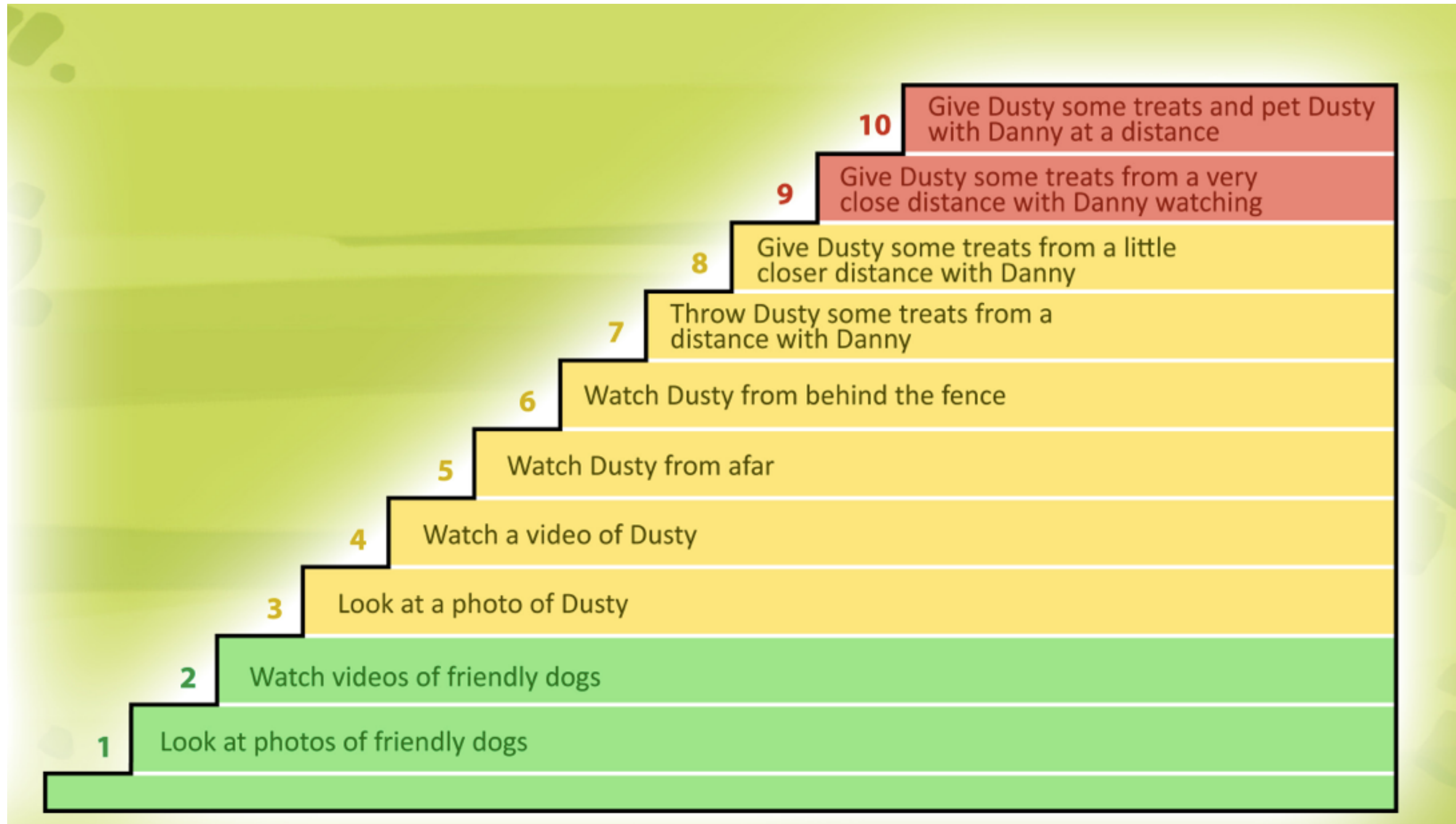
“Supposing it didn’t” said Pooh after
careful thought.

~ A.A Milne



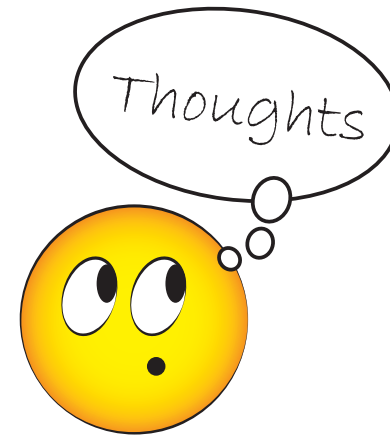
Facing One's Fears!

Exposure therapy/Desensitization



Regulation: I can create a more helpful thought

1) Thoughts
Create
Feelings



2) Feelings
Create
Action



Copyright © 2014 www.sharonelby.com

***Need to push the
“**pause**” button and
just observe one’s
feelings**





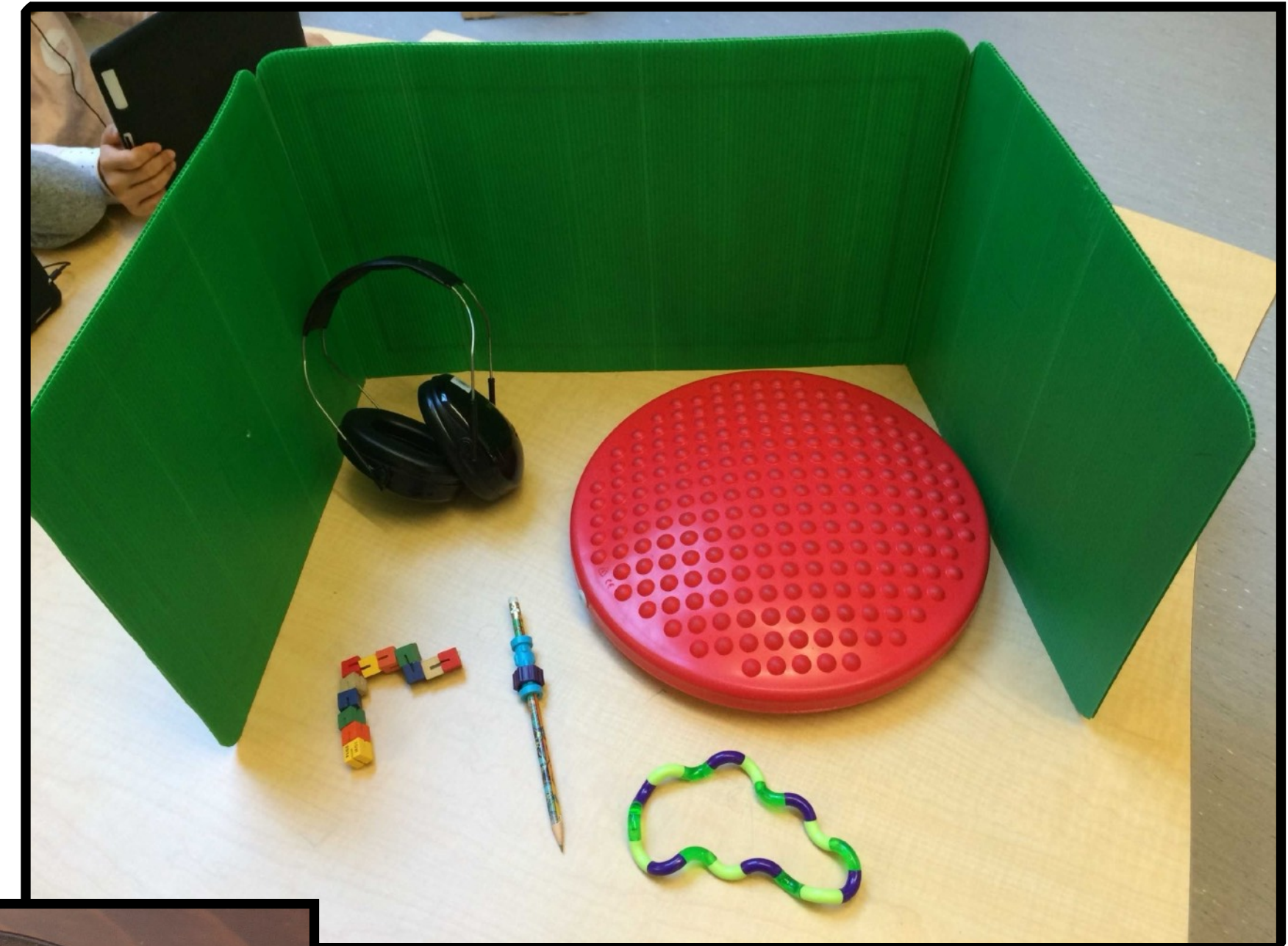
Remember, it's okay to feel nervous. Being brave means that we do feel nervous but as long as we're not in true danger, we go ahead and do what's making us nervous. Put those thoughts and feelings inside bubbles and watch them float away.



Regulation: I can breathe and calm my alarm centre



I have self-soothing strategies

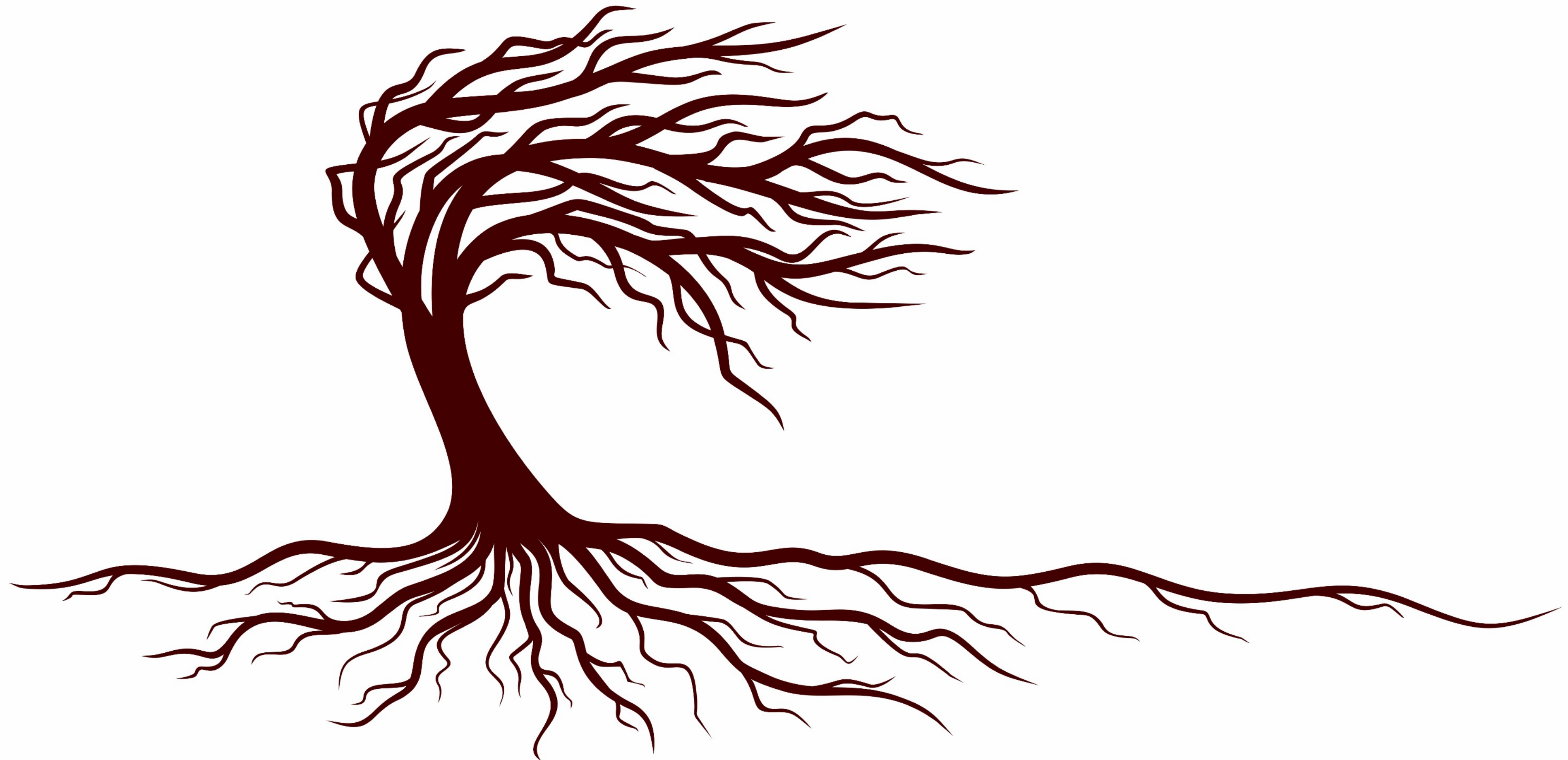


I have activities that help me calm myself



5. Risk... Taking Calculated Risks

Resilience



What is Safetyism?

Safetyism - ‘Safety’ trumps everything else, no matter how unlikely or trivial the potential danger.”

- Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*

Jonathan Haidt’s main thesis:

We are overprotecting our kids in the real world and underprotecting them in the online world.



The Decrease of Risky Play.... From this...



To this.... The ultra safe children's playground

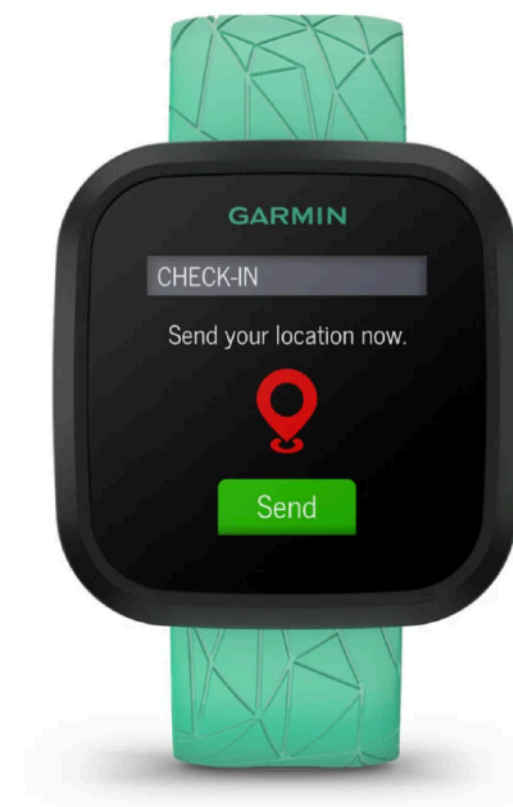


Tracking Devices

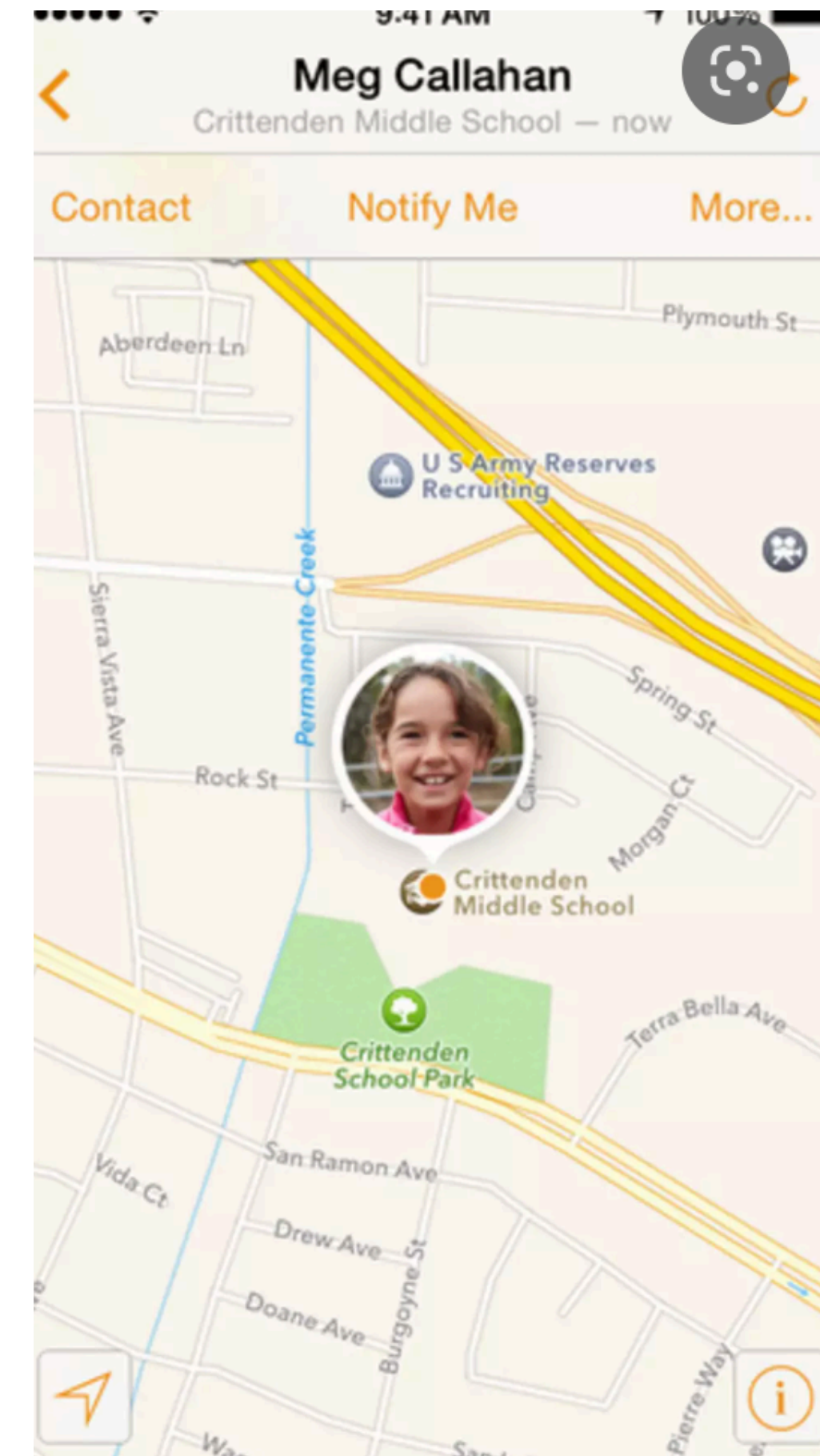
Do Tracking Devices Increase Anxiety or Reduce Anxiety?



Smart Watches



Find My Friend App



The Dynamic Dozen!

- 1. Create a secure and close parent-child relationship through weekly rituals**
- 2. Eat as many family meals together per week as possible!**
- 3. Set limits and boundaries on screens**
- 4. Be the parent-in-charge, the Alpha parent**
- 5. A child's well-being is not negotiable - Boundaries are essential**
- 6. Teach virtues and values**
- 7. Give your child chores**
- 8. Teach distress tolerance**
- 9. Teach problem solving and allow your child to solve their own problems**
- 10. Feelings First, Logics Last...Emotion Coach —> BE OPEN**
- 11. See all behaviour as communication...what is the hidden message?**
- 12. Give your child opportunities to take risks and be independent**



A Collaborative Divorce Model can teach:

- **Respectful problem solving**
- **Emotional regulation**
- **Child-centered decision making**
- **Cooperative Communication**

,

SUMMARY ~ Children are more resilient and therefore more confident and capable, when...

- They feel emotionally safe and strongly attached/connected to at least one caring adult = **Rooted**
- They feel heard - **Respected**. Their voice and feelings count. Their parents model self-regulation and they have learned to self-regulate and express their emotions. Boundaries are in place for them to be **Respectful**
- They know how to be **Responsible**. They can take responsibility for their problems and repair. They feel capable. They can solve problems.
- **Regulation:** They know how to handle distress and big emotions. They know that mistakes are a part of life and a way to learn. They have healthy ways to calm themselves (off screens).
- **Risk-Takers:** They believe in themselves and are willing to try new things and meet new people. They can take a bus independently, give a presentation in front of a class, climb a tree, make a phone call, answer a phone call, walk to the store etc.



Problem Areas:

- **Oversharing legal matters**
- **Oversharing financial matters**
- **Blaming the other parent**
- **Underprotecting kids online**
- **Overprotecting kids in the real world**
- **Disclosing infidelity by other parent**

The Importance of Positive Language

Parenting Plan versus Custody Battle

Two homes versus Broken home

Child-focused decisions versus Winning

Transition support versus Compliance

Mantras for Parents When Activated:

“Kids Come First!!”

“Take the High Road!!”

S.O.S

S.O.S

STOP

OPT-OUT

SELF-SOOTHE



GOALS FOR PARENTS GOING THROUGH DIVORCE

- **Emotional safety, stability and secure connection for child with each parent**
- **Structuring communication protocols**
- **Self-Regulation (S.O.S)**
- **Normalizing co-parent coaching**
- **Encouraging therapy before crisis levels**

**Receive Sharon's free E-Book and
explainer video:**

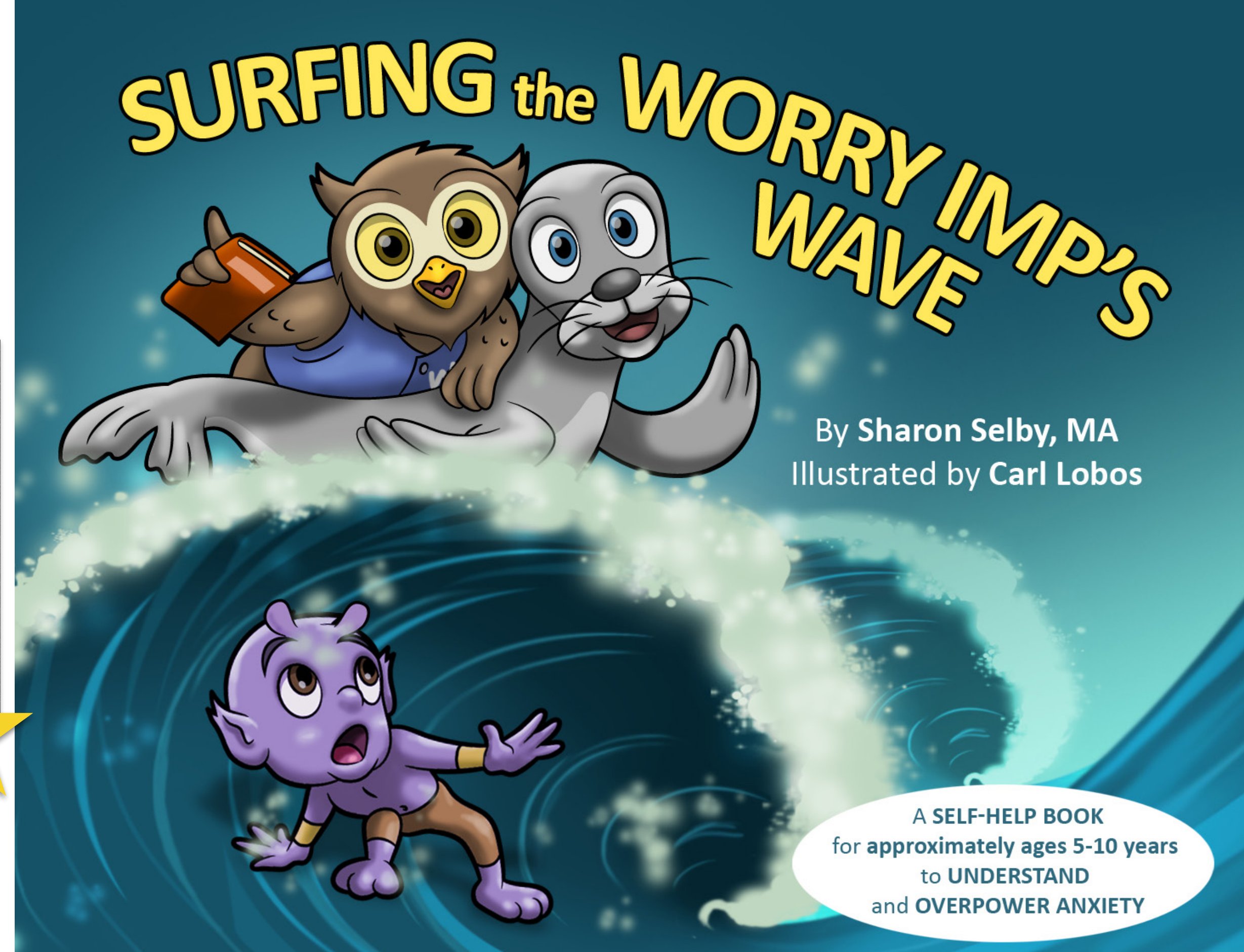
***8 Common Mistakes to Avoid When
Your Child Is Anxious***

at: www.sharonsselby.com



Available for Purchase
at www.sharonsselby.com

\$39.99 + GST and includes a
comprehensive Digital
Discussion and Activity
Guide



“Stress is the #1 health epidemic of the 21st century and parents and children are feeling it! This valuable book provides playful, science-based strategies to combat the “Worry Imps” in our lives. Thank you Sharon for helping parents and professionals move the needle on the issue of our time.”

~ Dr. **Shimi** Kang, Psychiatrist, #1 Best-Selling Author of *The Dolphin Parent*