

## Anxiety in children and teenagers



Michael Gordon  
St Leonard's College  
12<sup>th</sup> August 2019

## Today's talk

1. What is anxiety (and school refusal)?
2. What is depression?
3. Why are children & teenagers stressed (and depressed)?
4. What can parents do about it? Eight steps to building resilience.

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## Societal things that cause stress for a child

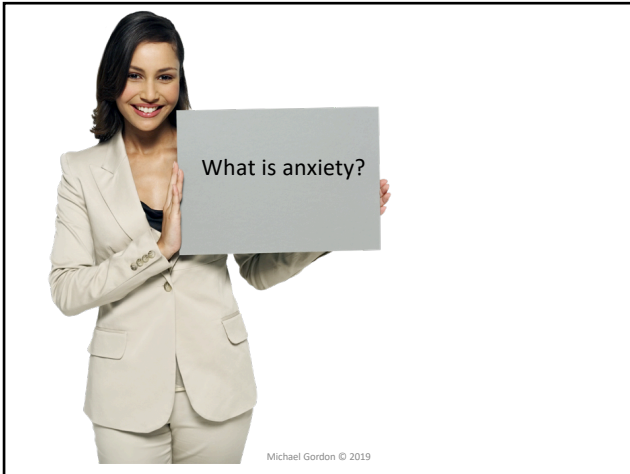
- Screens
  - Social media
  - Bullying
  - Access to inappropriate content
  - Excessive time spent on screens
  - Advertising – fear, desire (what haven't I got that I need?)
  - Constantly checking the screen for updates, many hours, displacement from exercise or face to face socialisation
  - Inability to turn off, or slow down

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## Societal things that cause stress for a child...continued

- Friends
- Over-scheduling
- Not enough sleep
- Family disruption
- Parental stress +++
- Academic pressures
- Fewer healthy outlets for stress
- Faster child development – increased IQ, but a mismatch between knowledge and emotional maturity.
- Loss of community

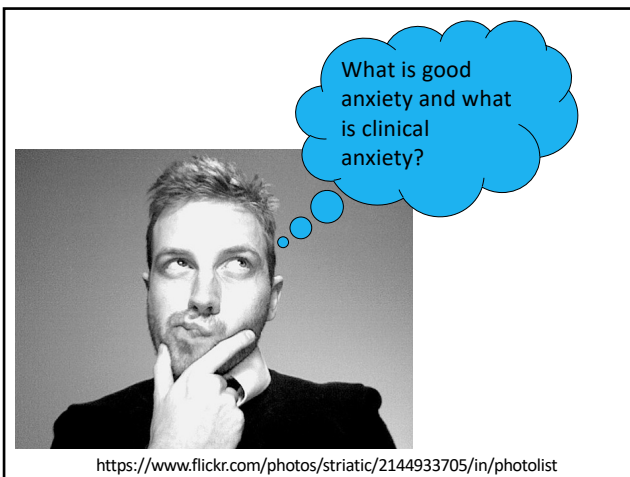
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### Words for anxiety

worry, concern, apprehension, apprehensiveness, consternation, uneasiness, unease, fearfulness, fear, disquiet, disquietude, perturbation, fretfulness, agitation, angst, nervousness, nerves, edginess, tension, tenseness, stress, misgiving, trepidation, foreboding, suspense,...

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## Anxiety is a good thing



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### Normal; what you would expect...

A bit clingy at the start of school, animal phobias, fears of the dark, strangers, storms

Some mild clinginess, scared of the dark, curtain calls, few obsessions, social anxiety, don't want to go on camp.

Fluctuating moods, problems with friends, can be reasonably irritable and rude to parents

Kinder/prep

Primary years

High school years

Time

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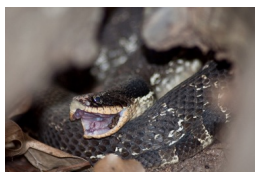
## What is clinical anxiety?

Anxiety is normal, however when the anxiety is a false alarm it becomes a problem



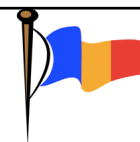
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## You see a belt, and think it is a snake



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## Symptoms that flag anxiety...



- Frequent school absences,
- Not attending school, frequently physically sick/unwell, in sick bay
- Drop off in school performance,
- Won't present in front of the class,
- Capable but avoids presenting work,
- Excessively worried, excessive need for reassurance, unrealistic worries,
- Lots of physical symptoms (headache, tummy aches),
- Checking, washing, counting, touching.

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## Anxiety disorders

- specific phobias
- social anxiety disorder
- separation anxiety disorder
- generalised anxiety disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorders
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- dissociative disorders
- panic disorders with/without agoraphobia
- agoraphobia
- anxiety disorder due to a medical condition (asthma, hyperthyroidism)
- substance-induced anxiety disorder
- anxiety disorder NOS
- selective mutism

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### Primary school

- Separation anxiety
- Specific phobias
- Generalised anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder

### High school

- Social phobia
- Separation anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Agoraphobia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder

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## Flavours of anxiety



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## Types of anxiety symptoms



1. **feeling** stress symptoms (e.g. anxiety, irritability, moodiness i.e. feeling anxiety)
2. **thinking** anxiety (I'm going to fail that exam, my girlfriend is going to drop me, I'm SUCH a loser, I feel that people are judging me, I worry about getting sick)
3. **physical** symptoms (e.g. headache, stomach pains, tiredness, chest tightness)
4. **compulsive** behaviours (e.g. checking, touching)
5. **dissociative** anxiety (derealisation, depersonalisation, voices)

## Responses to anxiety...

How do children cope?

## 1. Runaway



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## 2. Anger



## 3. Freeze



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## 4. Control



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## Common (maladaptive) responses to anxiety

- Freeze
- Fight
- Flight
- Control

- Cut
- Drink (use substances)

} Adolescents

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## Anxiety disorders

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Separation anxiety = avoidance of separation +/- somatic symptoms

Phobia = anxiety + avoidance

PTSD = anxiety + intrusive thoughts + avoidance behaviour +/- dissociative symptoms

Social anxiety disorder = anxiety + avoidance behaviour (of people) + cognitive symptoms

Agoraphobia = anxiety + avoidance (marketplace)

Panic disorder = severe anxiety + somatic symptoms

OCD = obsessional anxiety +/- compulsions

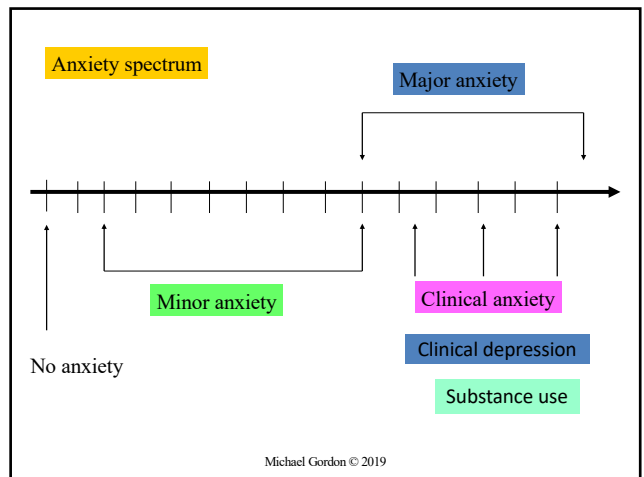
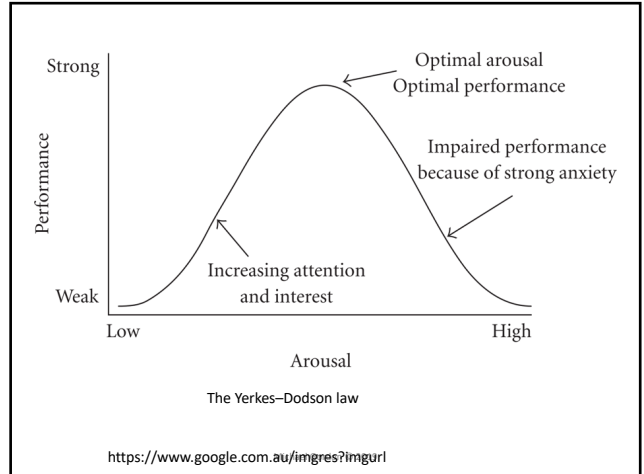
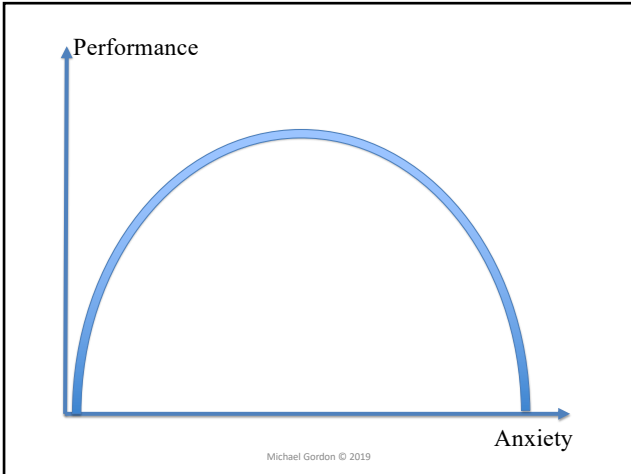
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How do we understand anxiety?

Performance



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### Problem anxiety is a logic free zone

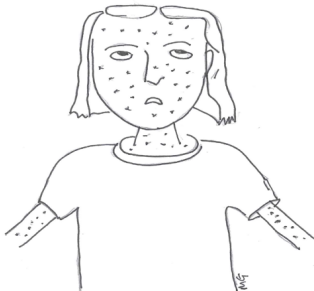
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### Robber in the rain



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### Which is the most contagious condition?



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### School refusal

- Prolonged school absence
- Symptoms include excessive fearfulness, temper tantrums, misery or somatic complaints without obvious organic cause when faced with the prospect of going to school.
- Causes much distress to parents and school personnel.
- Poses serious problems for the child's future development.

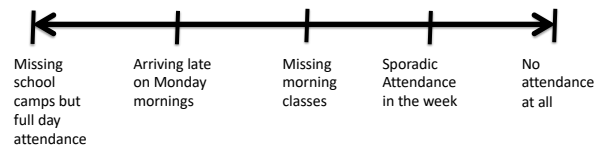
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### School refusal – definition continued

- Often results in prolonged school absence
- Symptoms include excessive fearfulness, temper tantrums, misery or somatic complains without obvious organic cause when faced with the prospect of going to school.
- Causes much distress to parents and school personnel.
- Poses serious problems for the child’s future development.

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### School refusal – spectrum disorder



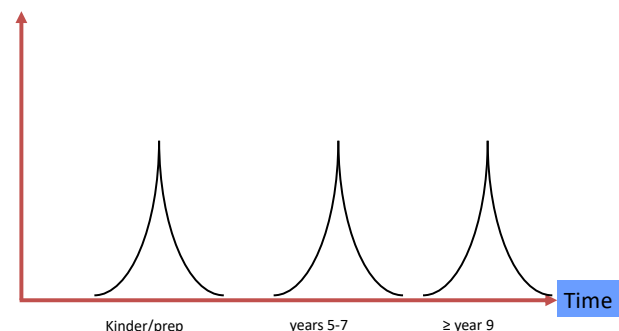
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### School refusal

- It is a spectrum disorder
- Where school days are being consistently missed, then it is a semi-emergency.
- The longer it goes on for, the less likely it is to remit. It is important to identify it early.
- Many schools are not aware of the problem until it has gone on for sometime.
- In some studies, only 30 to 50% of people who are treated for school refusal return to school.

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### Frequency of school refusal



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## School refusal

- Separation anxiety
- Social phobia
- Panic attack +/- agoraphobia
- Depression



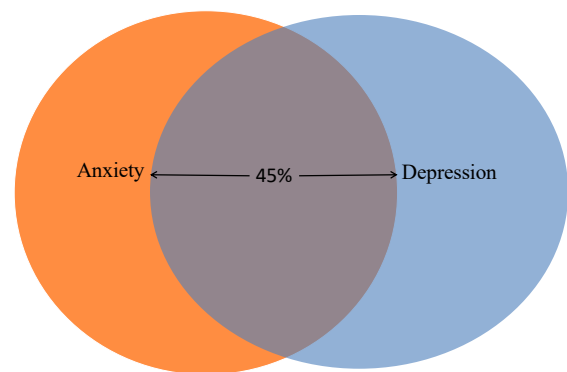
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## Anxiety disorders bring their friends



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## Anxiety and depression...



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## Today's talk

1. What is anxiety?
2. **What is depression?**
3. Why are children stressed and depressed?
4. What can teachers do about it?

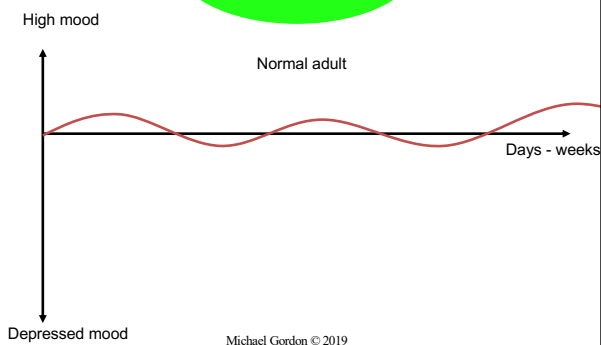
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## Words for depression

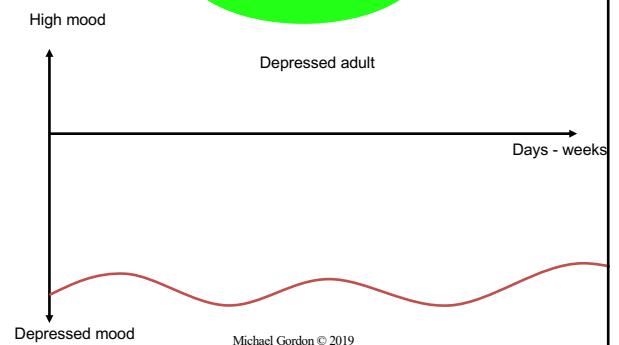
sad, saddened, unhappy, gloomy, glum, melancholy, miserable, sorrowful, dejected, disconsolate, downhearted, downcast, cast down, down, crestfallen, woebegone, despondent, dispirited, low, low in spirits, low-spirited, heavy-hearted, morose, dismal, desolate, weighed down, oppressed.

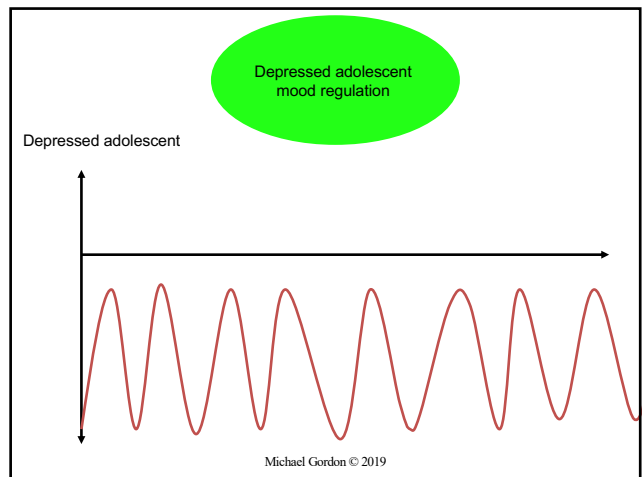
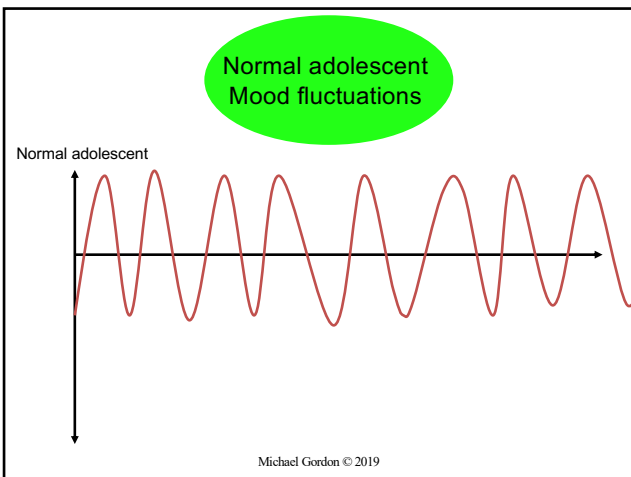
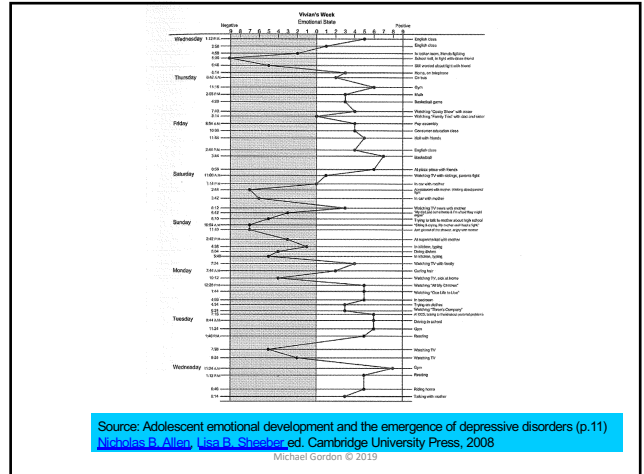
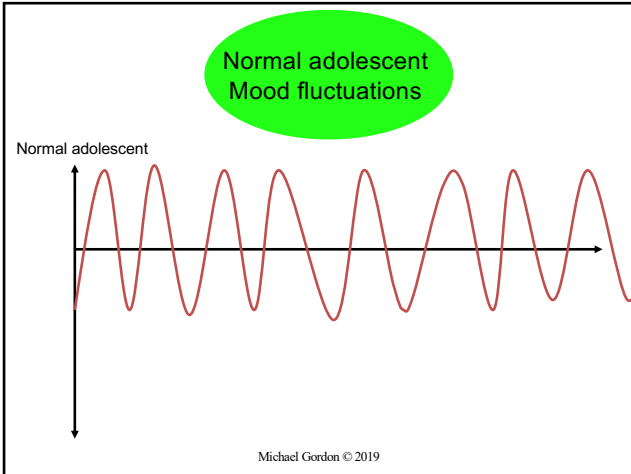
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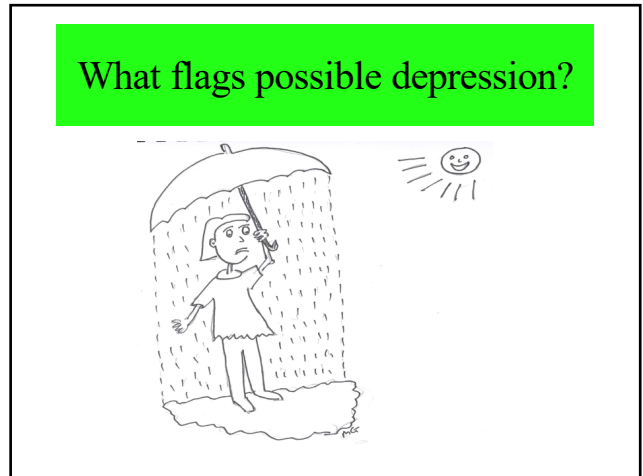
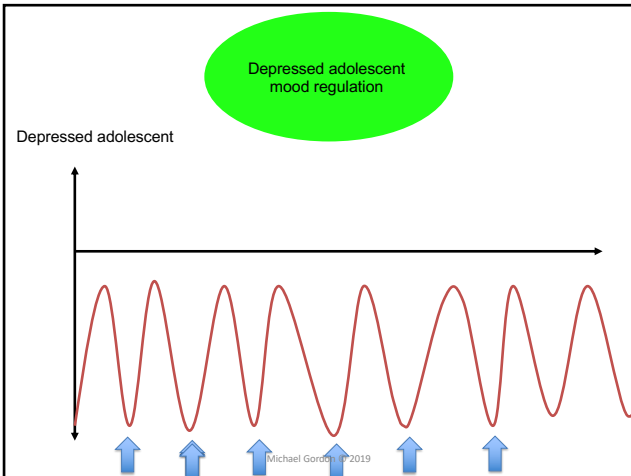
### Adult mood fluctuations



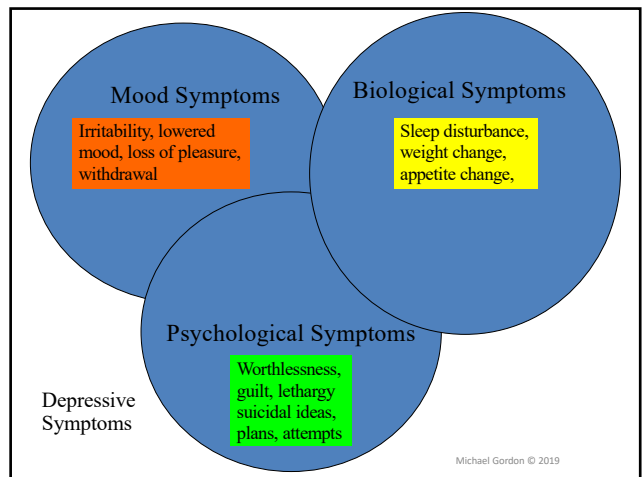
### Mood fluctuations







- ### Symptoms that might flag depression...
- Withdrawn into their room, withdrawal from friends
  - Prolonged sadness, cranky, moody, increase in anger
  - Loss of appetite, loss of weight, increase in appetite (comfort eating)
  - Hard to concentrate
  - Drop off in school marks
  - Poor self-esteem
  - Guilty thoughts
  - Suicidal thoughts, self-harm
  - Can't see things getting better in the future
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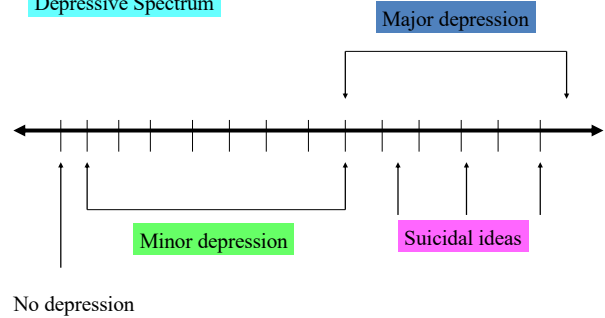
# Depression exists on a continuum



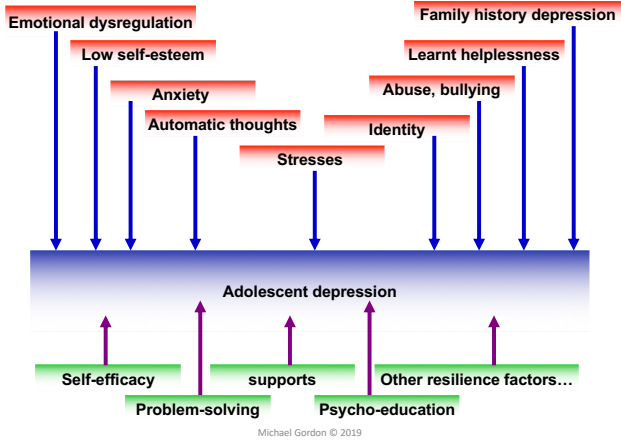
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## Depressive Spectrum



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# How common is depression?

## Depression - epidemiology

Major depressive disorder is

- < 1% pre-schoolers
- 2% primary school children (Male/Female =1:1)
- 5 to 9% adolescents (M/F=1:2)
- 10 to 20% adults (M/F=1:2)

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## Major depressive disorder

- Runs an episodic course, often arising in adolescence.
- Lasts 8 months clinically and 1 to 2 months non-clinical adolescents.
- Major depression remits (i.e. it goes away) in 80 to 90%, BUT in half it comes back later in adolescence or adult life.

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## Today's talk

1. What is anxiety (and school refusal)?
2. What is depression?
- 3. Why are children & teenagers stressed (and depressed)?**
4. What can parents do about it?

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## Adolescent challenges

- Separation from parents
- Finding their identity
  - Who am I?
  - What is happening to my body?
- Adolescent thinking
  - Seeking immediate rewards
  - Problems dealing with failure, disappointments
  - Risk-taking behaviours

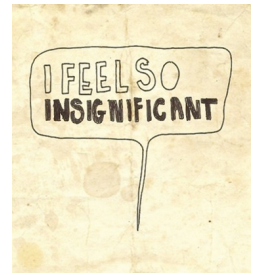
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## Adolescent thinking

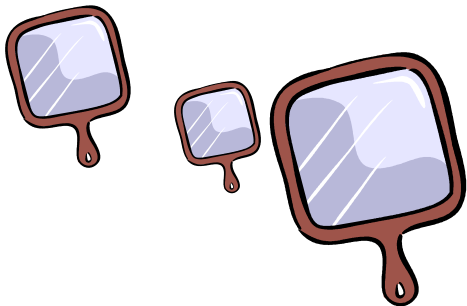
- I'm at the center of the universe.
- I'm the most important person in the room.
- It's all about me, me, me. Did I mention it is about me?
- I am not important.
- Everyone else is doing well, and I am not.
- I am the least important person.
- *Even* my father is more successful than me.
- I will not achieve anything in this life.

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Michael Gordon © 2019  
<http://www.thethingswesay.com/i-feel-so-insignificant/>

## Adolescents can't see themselves



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## How I look..



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How my friends tell me I look...



Risk taking behaviour

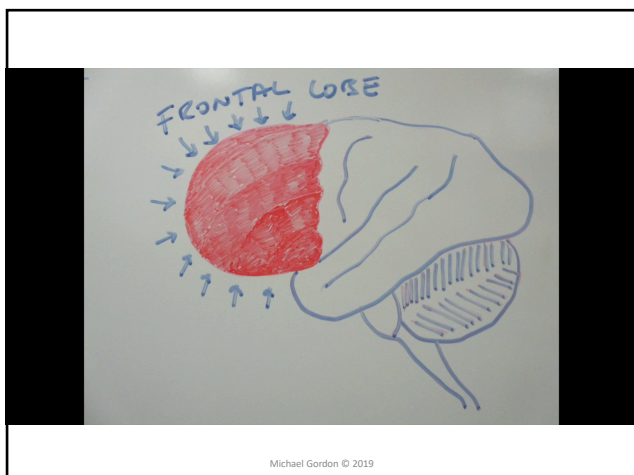
“the bigger the risk... the more the fun...”



Adolescent brain

In adolescence:

- Increased accidents
- Increased experimentation
- Increased risk-taking
- Increased novelty-seeking



## Risk taking

- e.g. unprotected sex and unplanned pregnancies, sexting, self-harm, smoking cigarettes, use of illicit drugs & alcohol, riding in car with a intoxicated driver, shoplifting.
- Evaluation of risks vs reward differs from adults.
- Increased in the presence of peers, i.e. the adolescent will take more risks in the presence of peers than alone (e.g. drinking, driving).

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## How do adolescents deal with disappointments?

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## Ways of dealing with big emotions

### Mature/adult way

- Talk to someone
- Ask for advice
- Seek comfort from a responsible adult
- Exercise
- Telephone a friend
- Go out shopping, film, coffee
- Review goals or plans
- Decide to do better in the future
- Get perspective (on the situation)
- Concentrate on positives

from The regulation of Emotions Questionnaire, Phillips & Power

## Ways of dealing with big emotions

### Immature/child-like way

- Bullying parents, siblings
- Arguing
- Put others down
- Throw stuff around the room
- Harm or punish myself
- Dwell on feelings
- Keep feelings locked up inside

from The regulation of Emotions Questionnaire, Phillips & Power  
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## How do children & adolescents communicate?

## Non-verbal communication

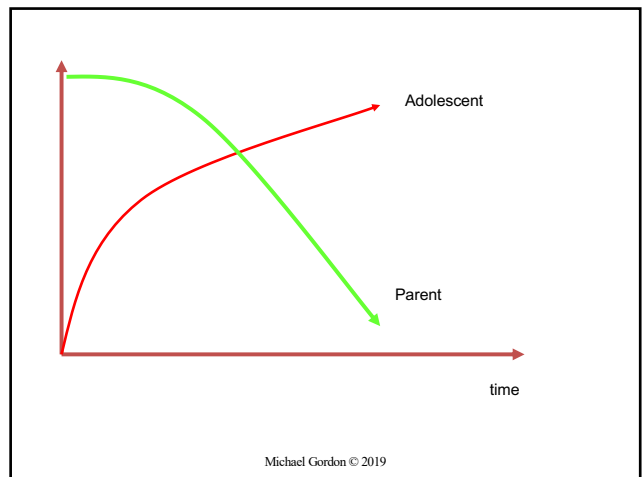
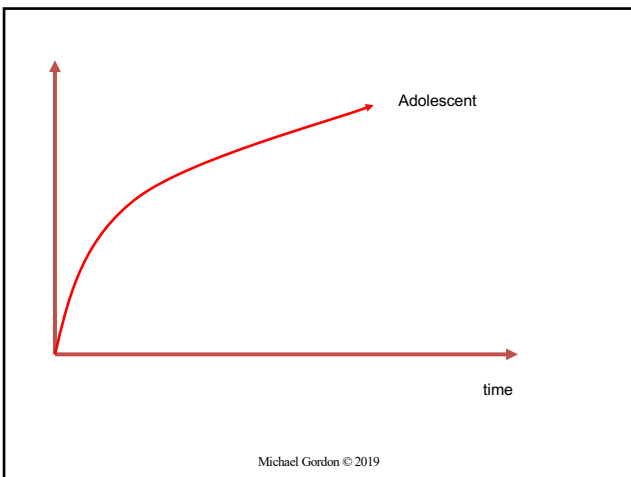
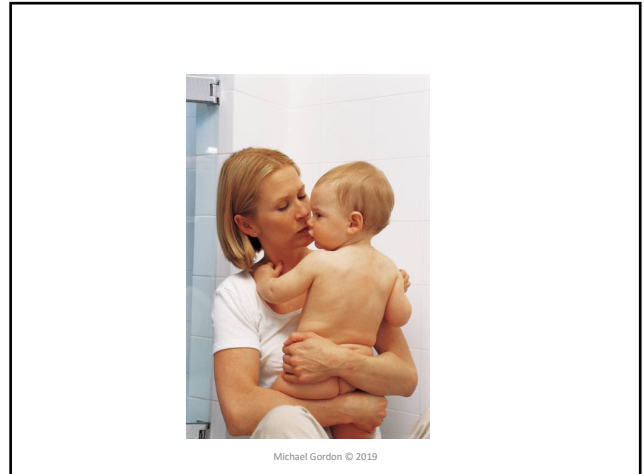
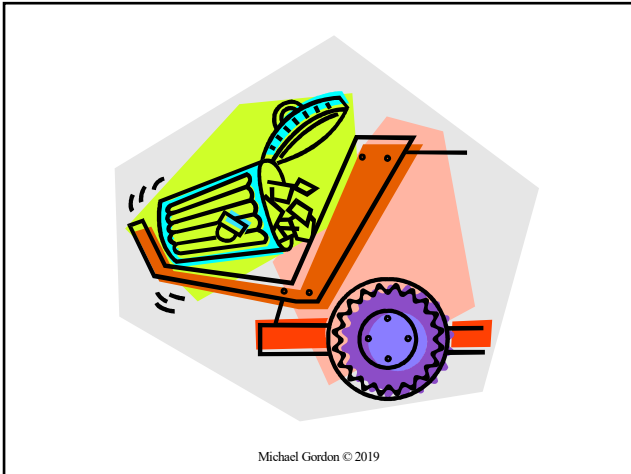


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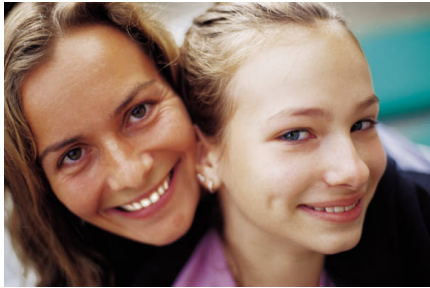
## Non-verbal communication



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Mother: Do you think I look good?  
Daughter: Who cares mum, no one is looking at you...



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## Today's talk

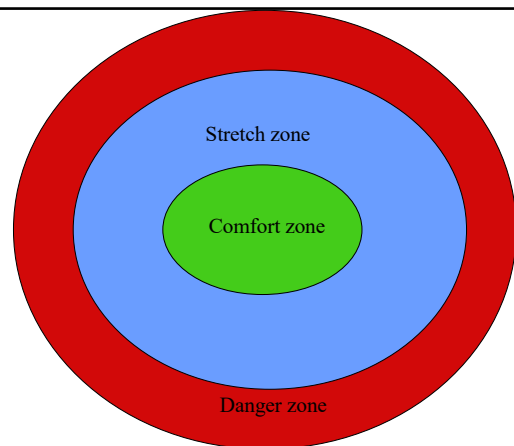
1. What is anxiety?
2. What is depression?
3. Why are children stressed (and depressed)?
4. **What can parents do about it?**

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Explain that anxiety is a false alarm



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**Comfort zone**




**Stretch zone**



**Danger zone**



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Leave me alone!

I'm feeling aggressive.

I'm starting to feel angry.

















I'm beginning to feel unhappy.

I'm feeling anxious.

I'm feeling calm.

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**The Zones of Regulation**

			
			
			
			
<b>Blue Zone</b> sad tired sick moving slowly	<b>Green Zone</b> happy calm feeling ok focused ready to learn	<b>Yellow Zone</b> frustrated worried silly/wiggly excited loss of some control	<b>Red Zone</b> mad/angry terrified yelling/hitting elated out of control

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**Menu**

- Massage from mum
- Tell mum
- Exercise
- Bath
- Shower
- Read a book
- Tantrum (not a good idea)
- ...



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Family is a safe place



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The child is the most anxious person in the room



[https://farm5.staticflickr.com/4044/4257136773\\_704c0b0dd5\\_o\\_d.jpg](https://farm5.staticflickr.com/4044/4257136773_704c0b0dd5_o_d.jpg)

Big emotions come as waves



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80% of life is turning up



### Parents need to work together



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### Importance of parents and teacher managing their own reactions

- Children and adolescents are able to put strong feelings into those around them, especially their parents.
- The child often attempts to control the situation.
- Need for the parent to avoid (as much as humanly possible) becoming upset or angry when the young person has an (emotional) tantrum.

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### Netball; if you need...



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### Parents as the young person's frontal lobes



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## Setting appropriate limits



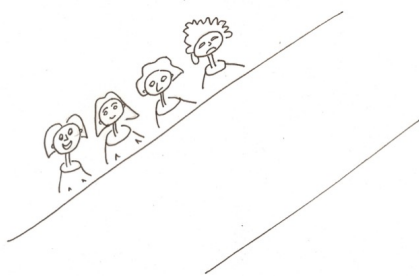
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## Children need to experience disappointments



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## Parents need to model good behaviour



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## The 'twelve' golden rules of parenting

1. Red apple – green apple.
2. Parents have to talk away from the child, agree on an approach, and then together meet with the child. Don't show your working out.
3. Parents need to be more calm than the child. The first pulse you take is your own.
4. Consequences vs punishment. Find the balance between love and discipline.
5. Parenting needs to be a guilt free zone.
6. Rights and responsibilities. The child has rights and responsibilities in equal measure.
7. Parents need to follow through with what consequences they have both agreed and told the young person.
8. Pick your battles.
9. Tag team parenting.
10. Be present for your child.
11. Imagine the situation from your child's perspective
12. No screens after 10 pm

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## Eight steps toward preventing depression and anxiety in your child

1. Mum and dad need to work together.
2. The parents are less anxious than the child/teenager.
3. Understand the anxiety or depression in your child as a non-verbal communication (what is their message?).
4. You need to use your frontal lobe (problem solver) to assist your child.
5. Ensure that your child is sleeping well. No screens or phones in the bedroom.
6. Make sure that they get regular exercise and eat well.
7. Take your own pulse and look after yourself.
8. Seek out professional help when you are not winning.

Michael Gordon March 2017



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