



Settling in

A parent's guide to supporting children who might find it difficult to settle into school.

from **Sheffield's Mental Health Support Team**



Information

This resource has been created to help you support your child if they are experiencing difficulties settling into school.

This resource contains evidence-based theory linking to practical guidance to support you to support your child.

Transitions are challenging

- Transitions are a big change for children and parents
- Some children can take longer than others to feel comfortable after a transition has taken place.
- Transitions can evoke some uncomfortable feelings for children and parents.
- Lockdown has meant that some children might not have had the ideal start.



Worry...

- worry is a feeling of unease and feeling unsettled.
- Everyone has feelings of worry at some point in their life.
- It's perfectly normal for children to feel worried when separating from their parents or guardians. Some children might require more support than others.



What might you notice if your child is struggling to settle?

1 Panic attacks / tantrums when separating from parents or caregivers

2 Fear of being alone

3 Fear of sleeping alone or sleeping away from home

4 Nightmares related to separation

5 Fear of going to school

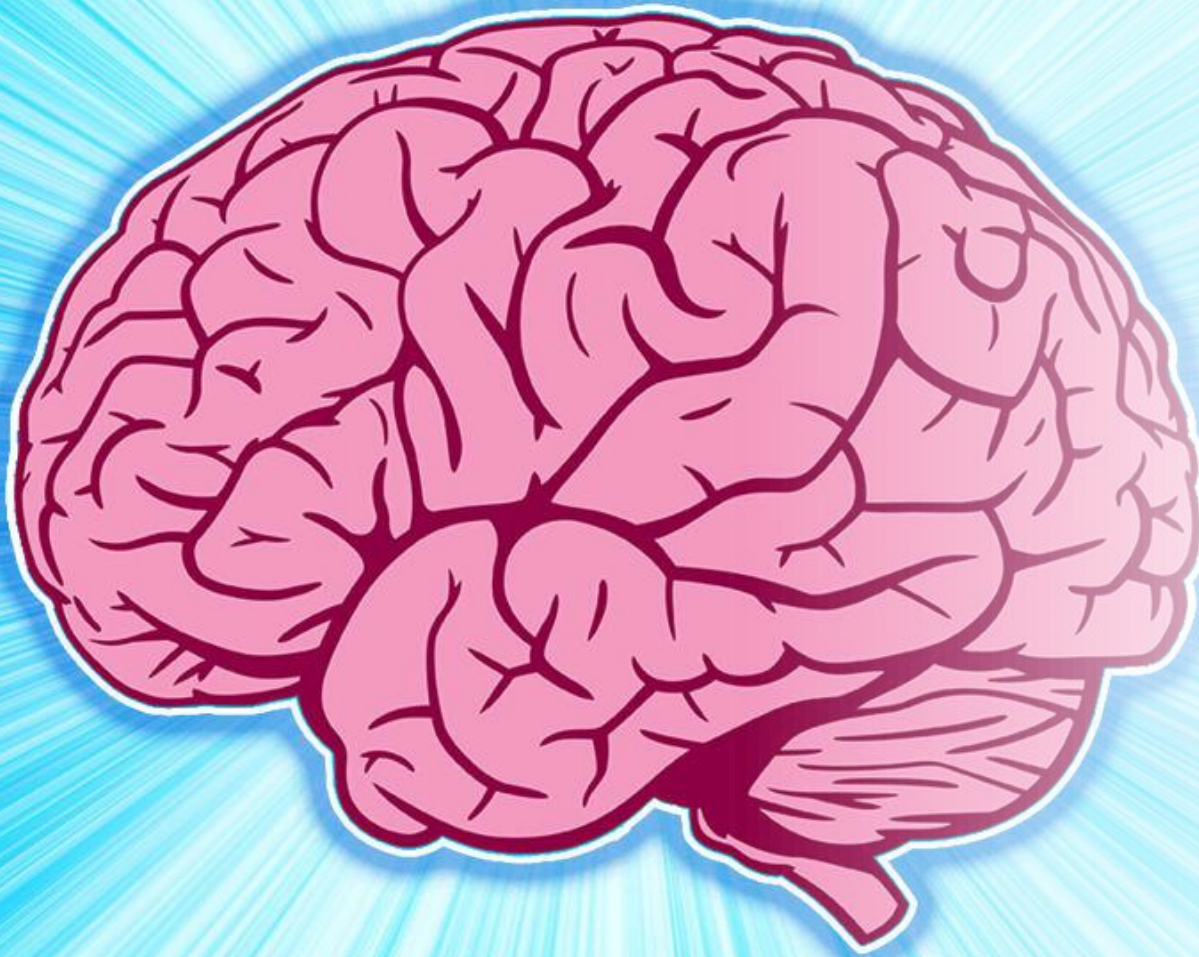


6 Stomach aches, headaches, muscle aches before separation and at the prospect of separation

7 Excessive concerns about personal safety

8 Excessive "clinginess" while at home

9 Bedwetting



Facts:

It is common for children to struggle to separate when they first start school.

Children will normally grow out of this

Also common for parents to experience.

It can be present at any age

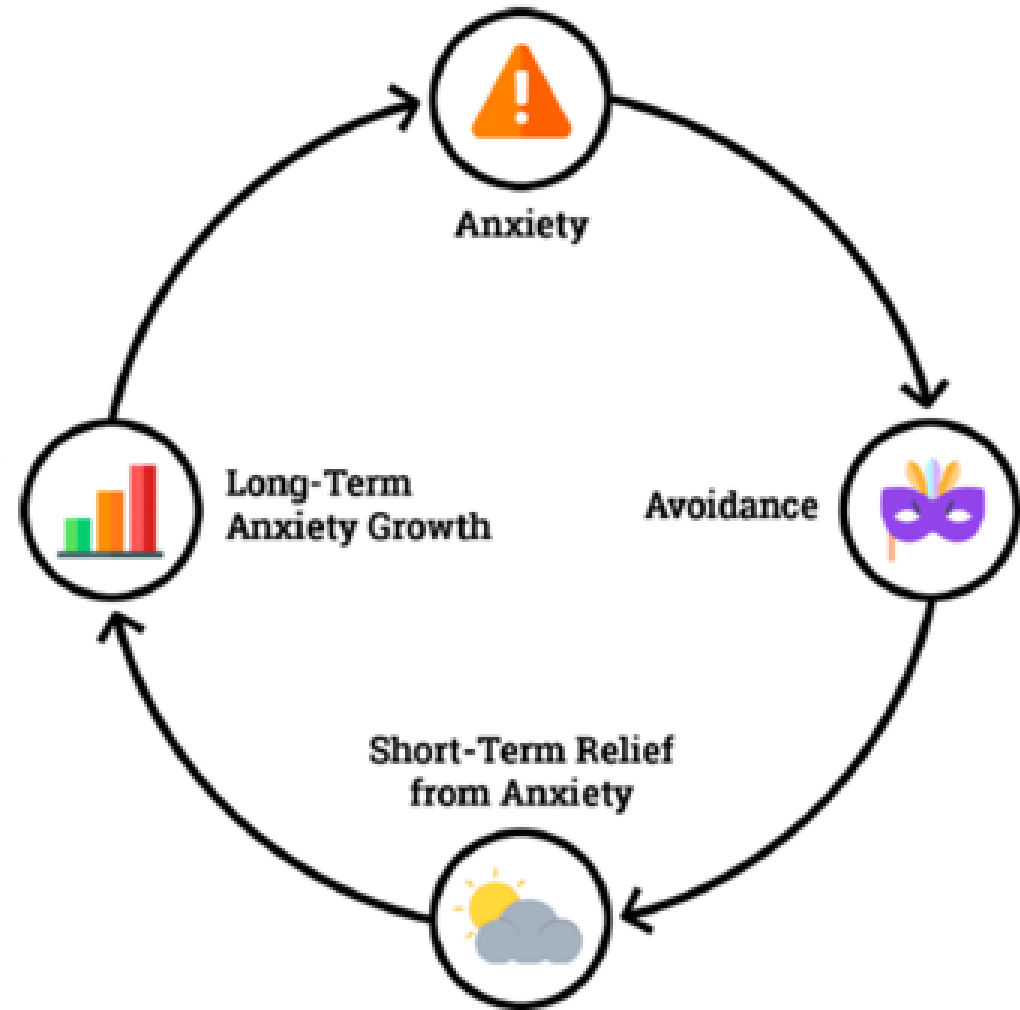
Equally common in boys and girls

Zones of regulation

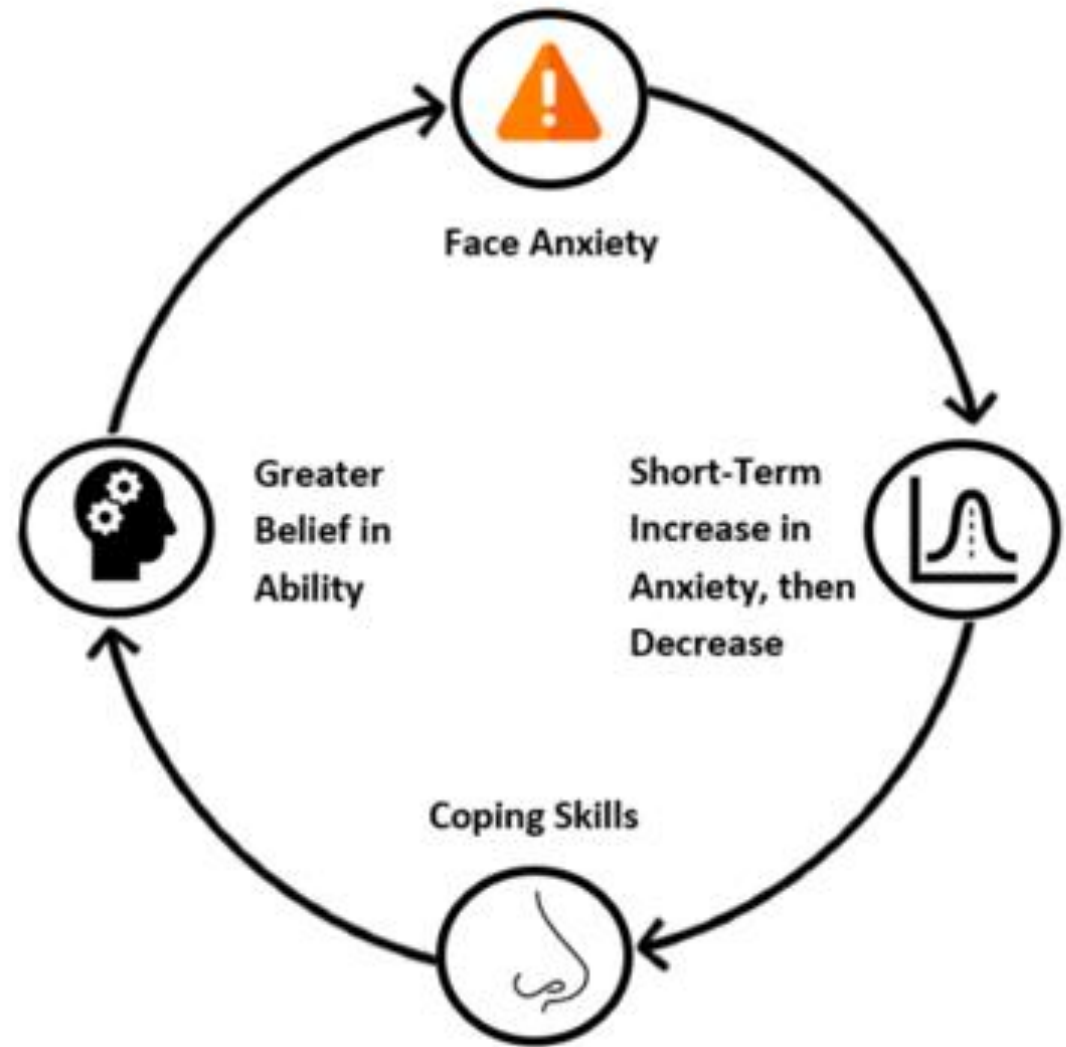
- Children will experience lots of emotions in school
- Your school uses this with your children.



What keeps
children feeling
unsettled?



Reversing the cycle



Reassurance:



- Most parents reassure their children at times, it is a natural response, and in some situations, it may reduce distress in the short-term.
- Anxious children often seek out reassurance from their parents and others, therefore, it is not surprising that parents respond to these requests.
- However, reassurance sometimes does not help the child to feel less anxious in the long run.
- Reassurance can be addictive: the more the child gets reassurance, the more they will want it and think they need it.

Reassurance



children need to begin to be able that they can deal with their fears themselves and are able to test out for themselves whether their worried thoughts are accurate.

Reducing reassurance can be attempted gradually and in a way that feels comfortable for the parents.

Reducing reassurance is not about responding at all; it's about responding differently.

What can you do?



Normalising

Let your child know that they are not the only one who gets anxious:

“I remember when I got anxious about [example]” or “Lots of children feel worried about different things”.

Using these statements can help the child not feel like they are different, and other people get anxious too.



What else?

Keep curious

Remaining curious throughout these conversations is key!

Asking things like “have I missed anything?”, “can I check my understanding of this with you?” are helpful for getting the best understanding of your child’s fears and worries.



Provide certainty

- Provide certainty where possible- who can they talk to, how they can communicate to you if they are not okay?



Recognise

- Support your child to recognise what's going on and think how they can stop avoidance



Plan who might be best to drop off the child at school in these circumstances; a parent/ carer, grandparent or childminder, if that is usual. At the time of drop off, remember to keep it short and sweet. Once the familiar faces of friends and teachers are there to greet your child at the gate, say goodbye and leave so they can focus on the potential excitement of school rather than sadness or anxiety of a parent leaving.

Short and sweet school drop off

When school starts back, it is important to incorporate the above advice in your drop off. Whilst it is understandable to feel worried or anxious about leaving your child in the morning, children can often pick up on this, and this can sometimes make them feel anxious about you leaving too.

Practical information





What do school
already do that
provides
structure

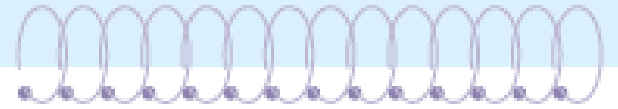
- School have a member of staff on the door to meet and greet in the mornings.
- regular 'check ins' take place with the whole class after playtimes.
- There is a worry monster in each classroom that the children can bring over to an adult to indicate they have a problem.
- information is shared with lunchtime staff and a handover takes place at the end of lunch.
- Children are handed out to parents and school share positive news

Positivity

Positivity

When discussing the return to school, always try to do so in a positive way, especially when your child may be able to hear you. The teachers are working hard to prepare for the return to school, so have faith that it will be OK and show that faith to your child.

Children can be perceptive and may pick up on any anxiety or negativity you may be feeling yourself. While this is totally natural given the circumstances, if you have any concerns, try to address them with the school without your child around. Instead, talk to your child about things they can look forward to, like seeing their friends every day, a lesson they enjoy or meeting their new teacher. Encourage them to have a positive attitude about starting school.



Three reasons I am excited about school...

1.

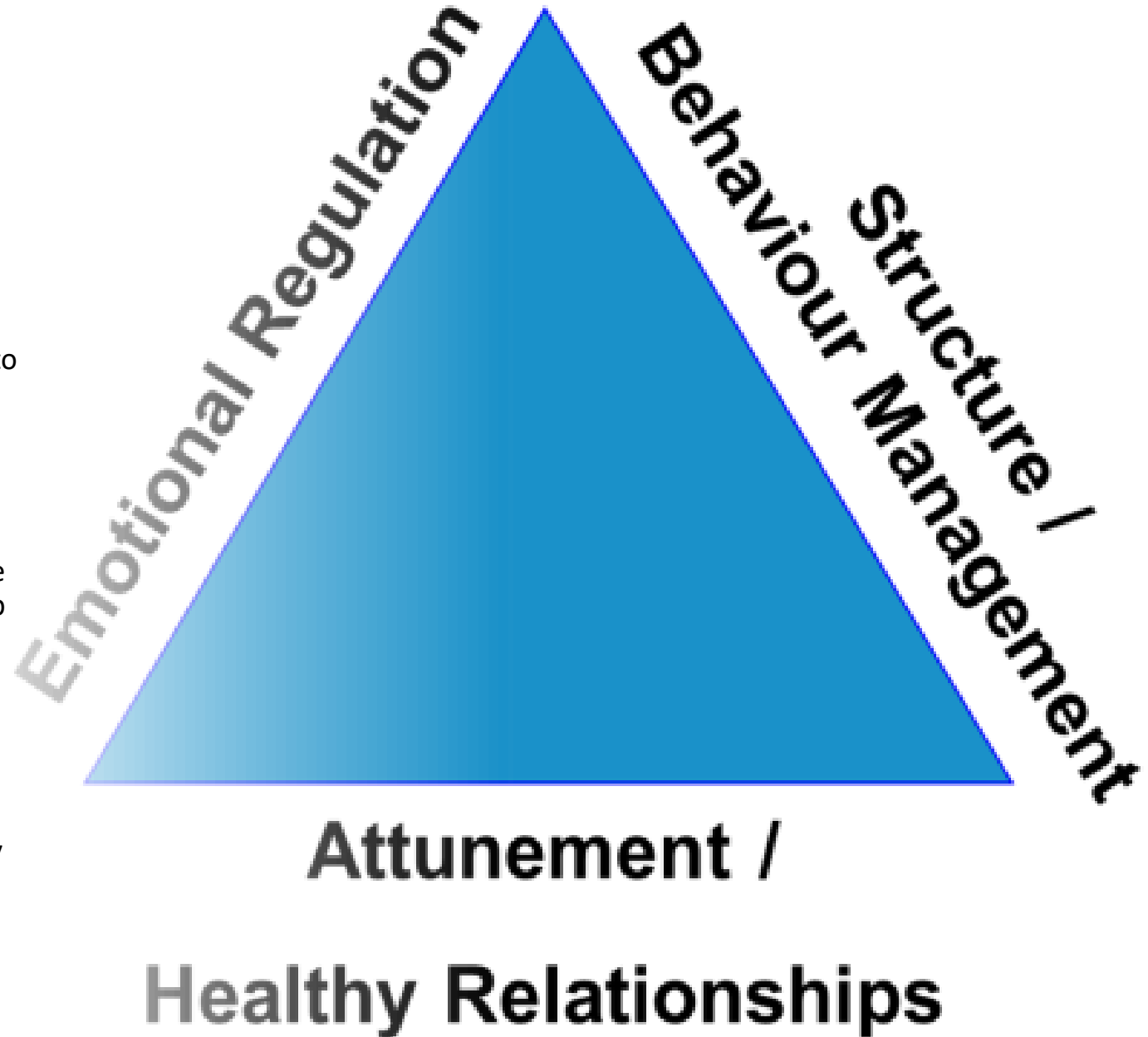
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3.



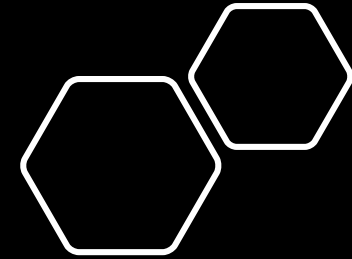
The Healthy Minds Structure:

- **Structure** - Provide structure where possible to ensure children feel safe and secure. What is the structure in your home? Homework time, gadget time, mealtimes, bedtime?
- **Emotional Regulation** - Support young people in identifying when they feel anxious and help them get back into their thinking brain. E.g., deep breaths
- **Attunement** - Relationships are key. When children feel they have someone to talk and support them they are going to be more likely to be able to cope with uncertainty and anxiety.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Attunement** • Give the person time to talk
- Attunement** • Listen by being curious and open minded
- Emotional Regulation** • Let the person know that you have heard them
- Emotional Regulation** • Acknowledge how the person is feeling
- Structure** Support them in thinking about what may help



More useful things to try:

- **Worry time** is a structure contained time where your child can openly talk about issues throughout the day they have been worrying about. There is no judgement, just actively listening and validating their concerns. Problem solve collaboratively if possible.
- **“Today and Tomorrow”**: Discuss about all the events that have happened today then discuss about their plans and any hopes for tomorrow.
- **2 Stars and a Wish**: Talk about 2 good things that has happened today and 1 wish on what could be done differently next time.

Calming activities



Activate your Senses!

Take notice of your senses and name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel or touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell (or like to smell)
- 1 thing you can taste (or like to taste)



Speedy Hands!

Put the palm of your hands together.
Rub your hands together as fast as you can for 10 seconds.
Gently place your hands over your eyes for 5 seconds.
Take a deep breath in and out.



Finger Breathing

Use your finger to trace around the edges of the fingers on your opposite hand.
Breathe in as you go up the finger.
Breathe out as you go down the finger.
Repeat this for each finger slowly breathing in and out each time.



Facts about Me

Think about and name some facts.
For example, think:
My name is...
My age is...
I am wearing...
The weather today is...



Desk Push

Place your hands or fists on the top of the table or desk.
Now push downwards and hold (not too hard!) for 10 seconds.
Relax and notice how your arms feel.



Bear Hug

Wrap your hands around your shoulders or knees and give yourself a big firm hug.
Squeeze for 10 seconds.
Relax and notice how your body feels.

Circle of security

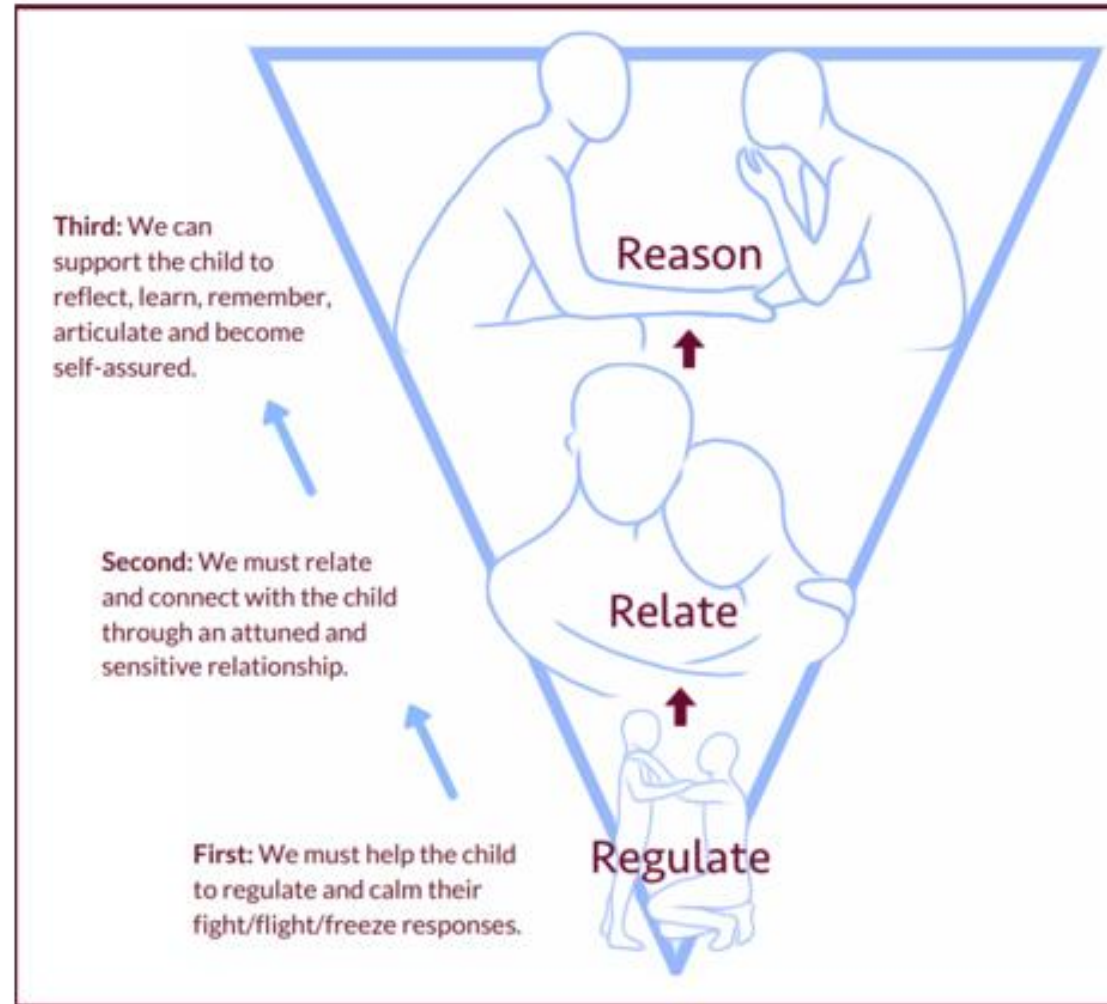
- [Circle of Security Animation - YouTube](#)



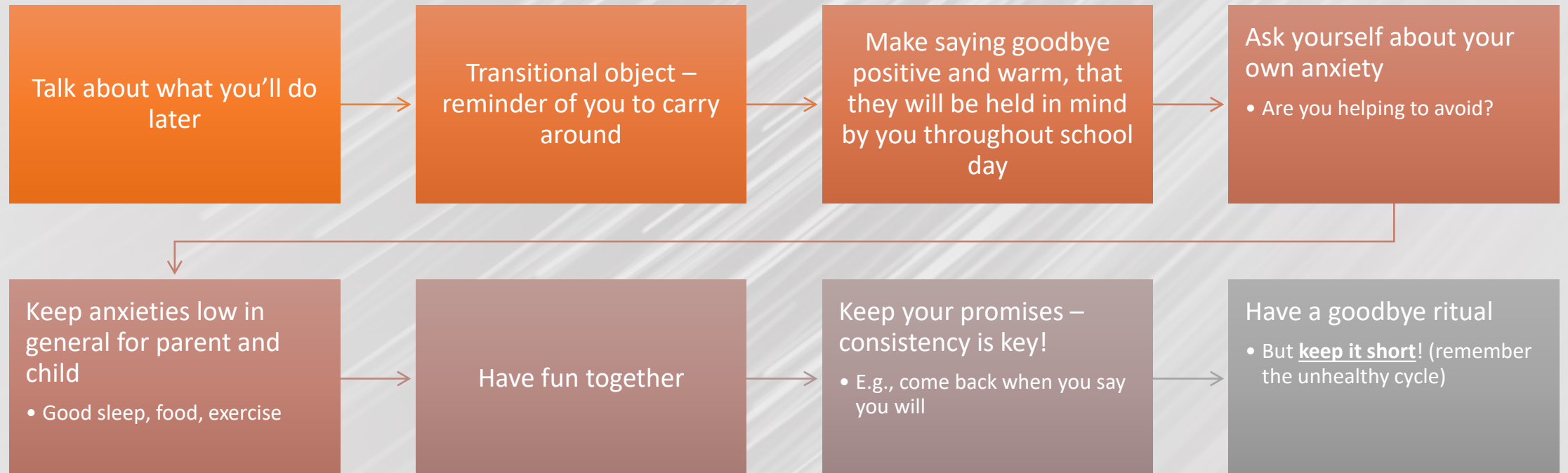
'calm' swan



THE 3 R'S: REGULATE, RELATE, REASON



In summary:



Further resources:

- <https://www.rdash.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Anxiety-leaflet.pdf>
- <https://www.icope.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Stress-Relaxation-Workshop-Handouts.pdf>
- <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/?f1=10145&f2=10146&f3=10152&page=2#listing>
- <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/therapeutic-resources/pace-a-brain-based-parenting-approach>
- <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-Three-Rs.pdf>

Thank you
and any
questions?

