



ANXIETY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

roslyn preschool workshop series

Dr. Jillian brass

AGENDA

- 1 what is anxiety?
- 2 anxiety reinforcement cycle
- 3 behavioral interventions for anxiety
- 4 selective mutism
- 5 coping skills

Why Do People Have Anxiety?



- Anxiety is normal
- Anxiety is adaptive
- Fight or flight
- Associated physical symptoms/experiences
- Real and imagined threats

When we Worry about anxiety

disruptive Behavioral
response



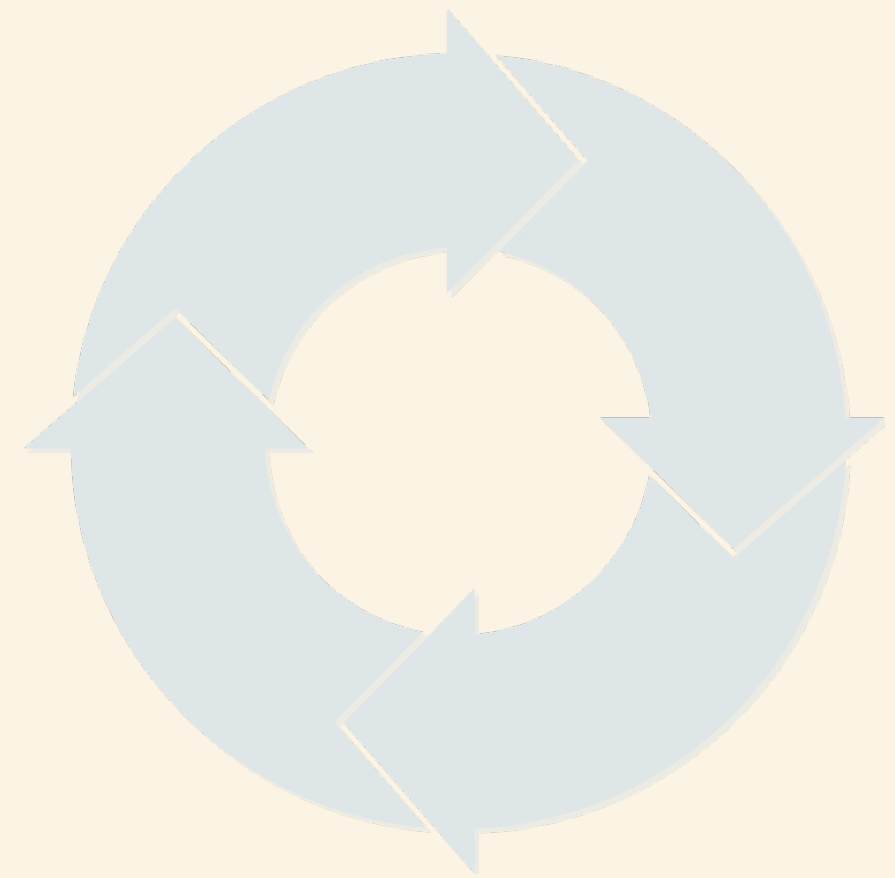
Avoidance of life
activities



Excessive distress

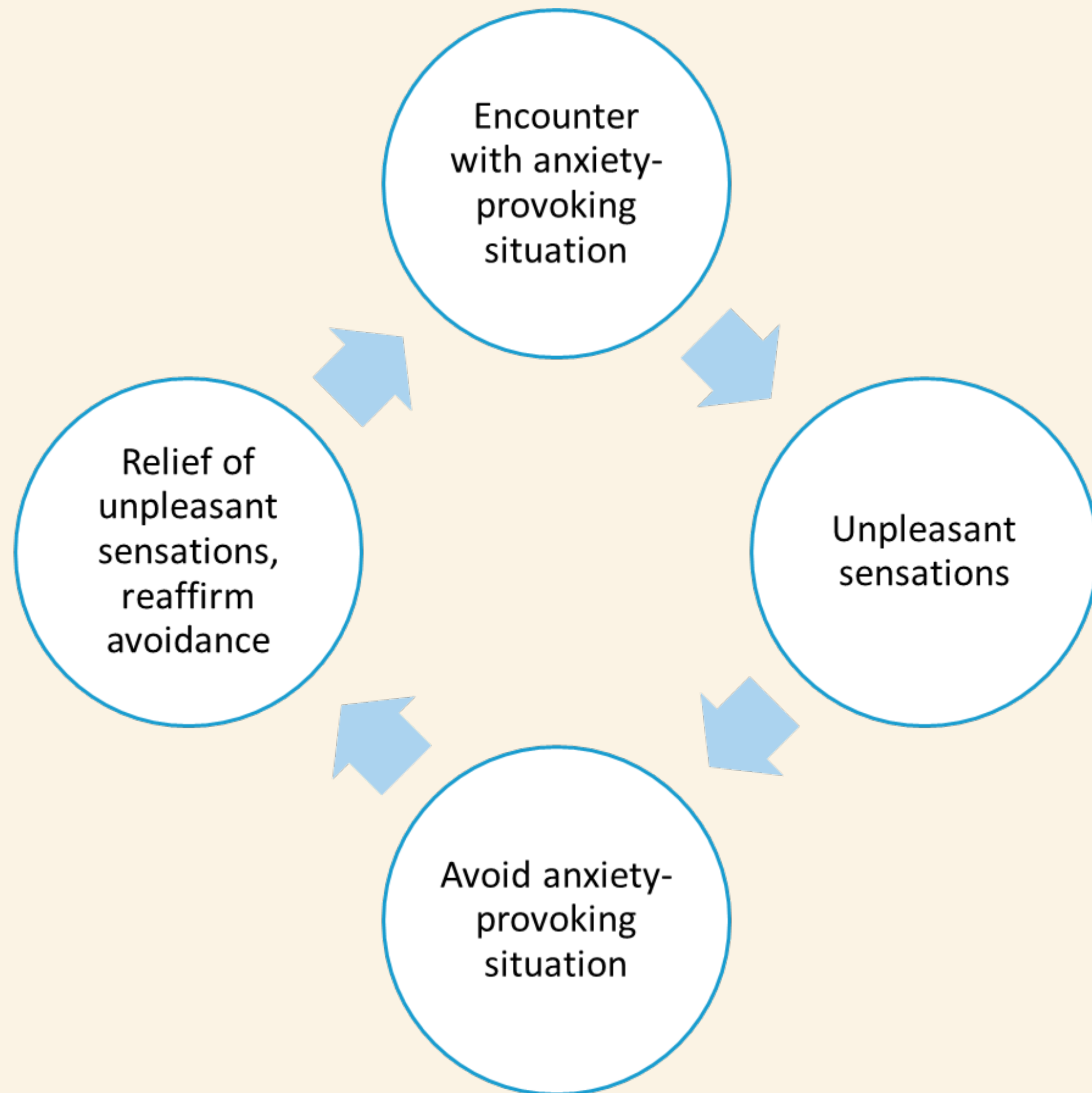


NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT IN ANXIETY



- The 'misunderstood' reinforcer
- Removal of an anxiety-provoking event
 - causes physically uncomfortable symptoms to disappear
 - brings a feeling of relief
- This cycle reinforces avoidance of the situation





how you act when COVID-19 cancels all those events you really didnt want to go to anyway

ANXIETY IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD



- “Use it or lose it”
- Habits and patterns of behavior that are frequently used become stronger and more automatized
- Lockdown naturally reinforced a lot of anxiety-avoidant behavior
- Having to venture back out into the world to work and socialize produced anxiety in many people
- These events were linked with the further anxiety of possible contamination

INTERVENTION IN A PRESCHOOL SETTING



- In early childhood, intervention for anxiety is largely experiential and behavioral
- The most important thing we can do in early childhood to combat anxiety and prevent it from becoming clinically significant is to teach and model distress tolerance
- Distress tolerance means that children will sometimes be uncomfortable
- In getting through discomfort, children develop an understanding that they can handle things and achieve confidence



WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO REDUCE THE PAIN OUR
CHILDREN MUST LIVE THROUGH, BUT WE CAN
HELP THEM MOVE FORWARD.

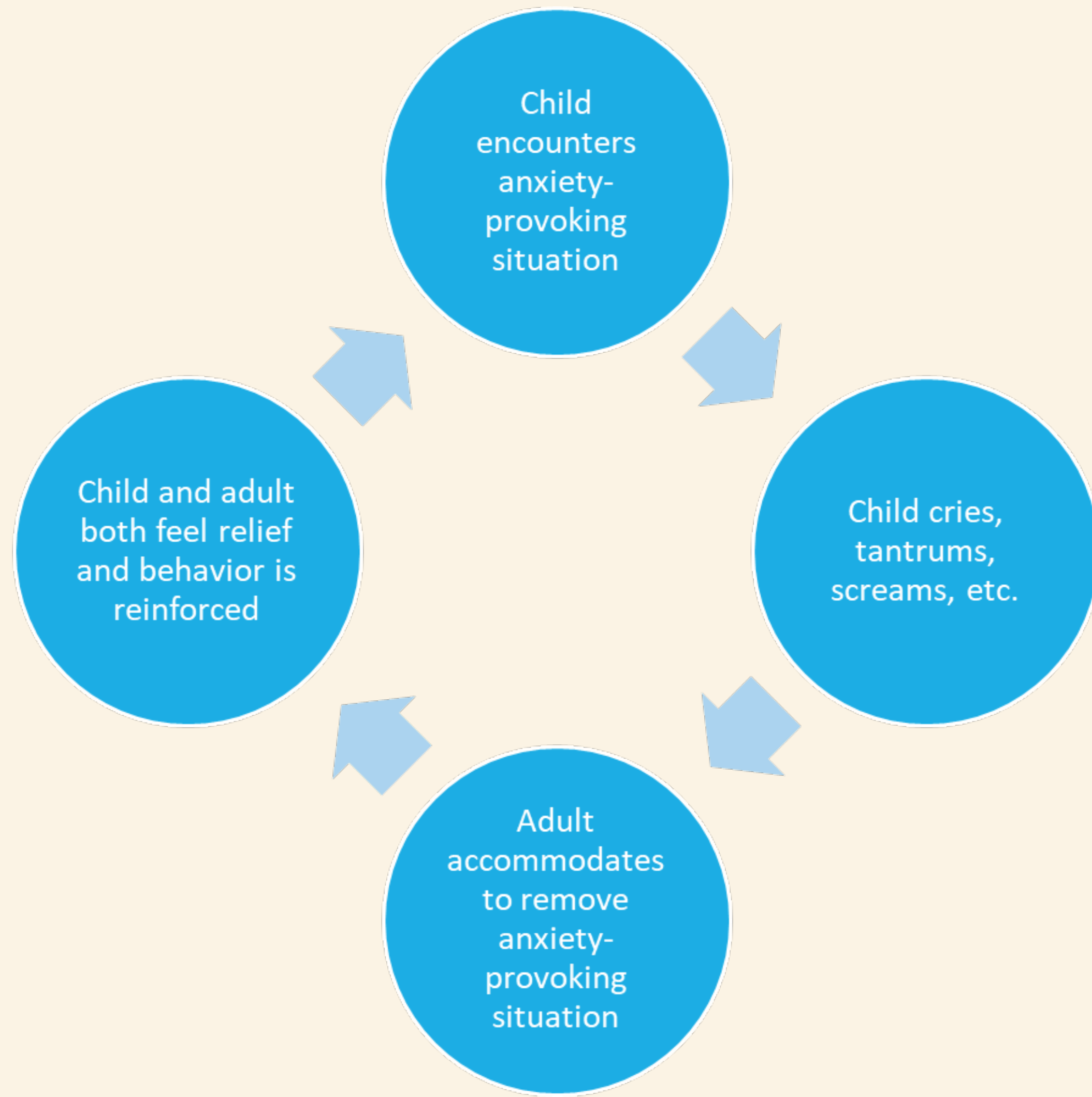




THE SPACE APPROACH TO CHILDHOOD ANXIETY

- Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions
- Family accommodation--changes families make to help the child feel less anxious
- The way we are wired--child in distress, parent responds and protects
- Child learns that they need rescue



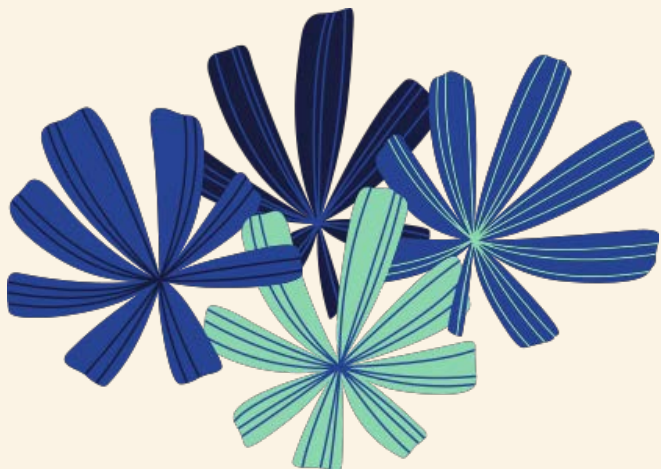


Supportive

acceptance

understanding how uncomfortable, nervous, or scared a child feels

being confident in a child's ability to do it



Supportive statements

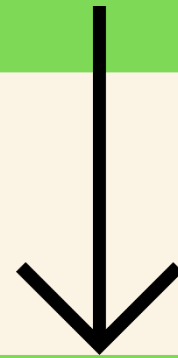
1

acknowledge the
anxiety

2

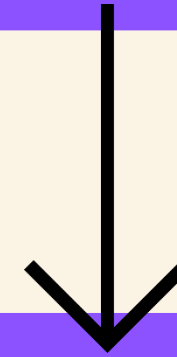
express confidence in
child's ability to cope

i know how anxious you get
about talking in front of lots of
people.



And i know you are strong
enough to handle that anxiety.

it's very hard for you to eat at
school because it really makes
you scared.



and i also know you are brave
and can handle being scared!

Children learn...

1

you can handle anxiety



CALM



2

anxiety will pass





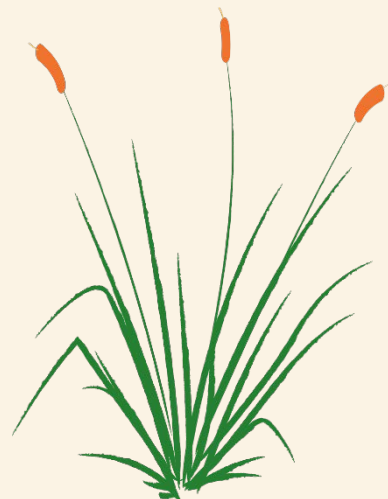
using accommodation
appropriately

ACCOMMODATIONS SHOULD..



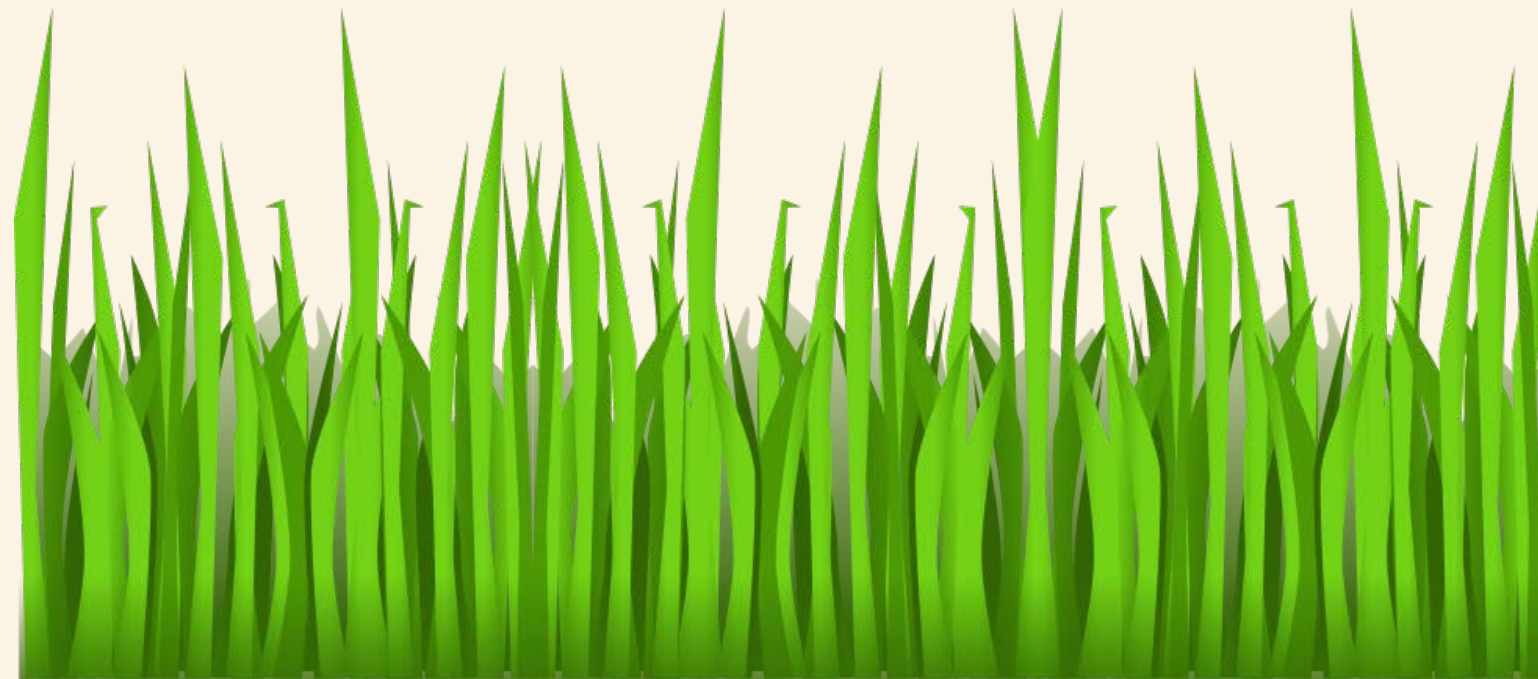
1

Lead to increased coping



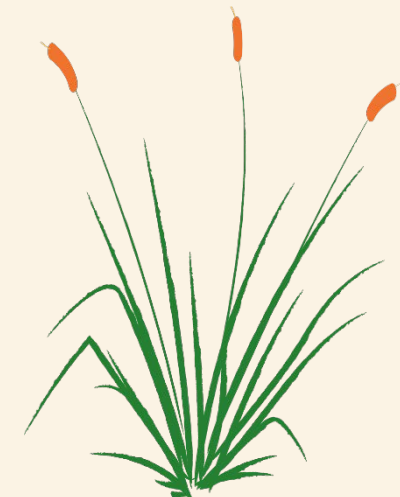
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help a child cope more and
avoid less

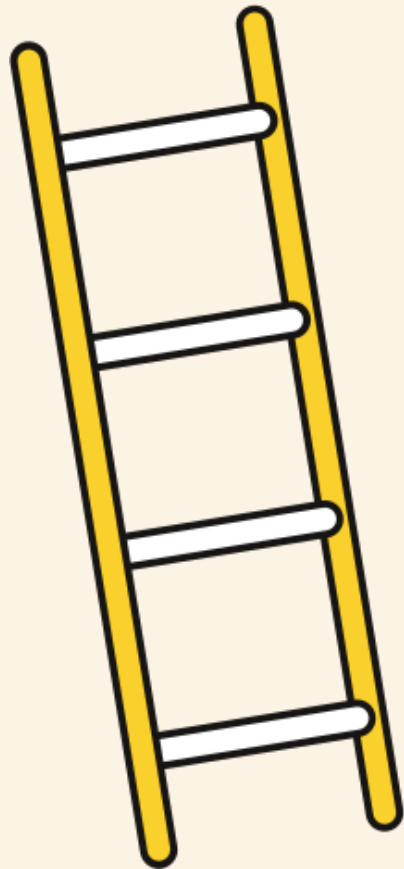


3

be removed when no longer
needed



IS YOUR ACCOMMODATION HELPFUL?



is it helping the child gradually cope
more?

is it a step forward?

is the child becoming anxious of more
things?

WHEN ANXIETY PRESENTS AS OPPOSITION



- One of the hallmarks of anxiety is feeling like you lack control/comfort in a situation
- We feel less anxious if we can take back control or make things the way we would like them to be
- At times, these behaviors might be interpreted as indicative of “behavior problems”

COMMON PRESENTATIONS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN



freezing/shutting down

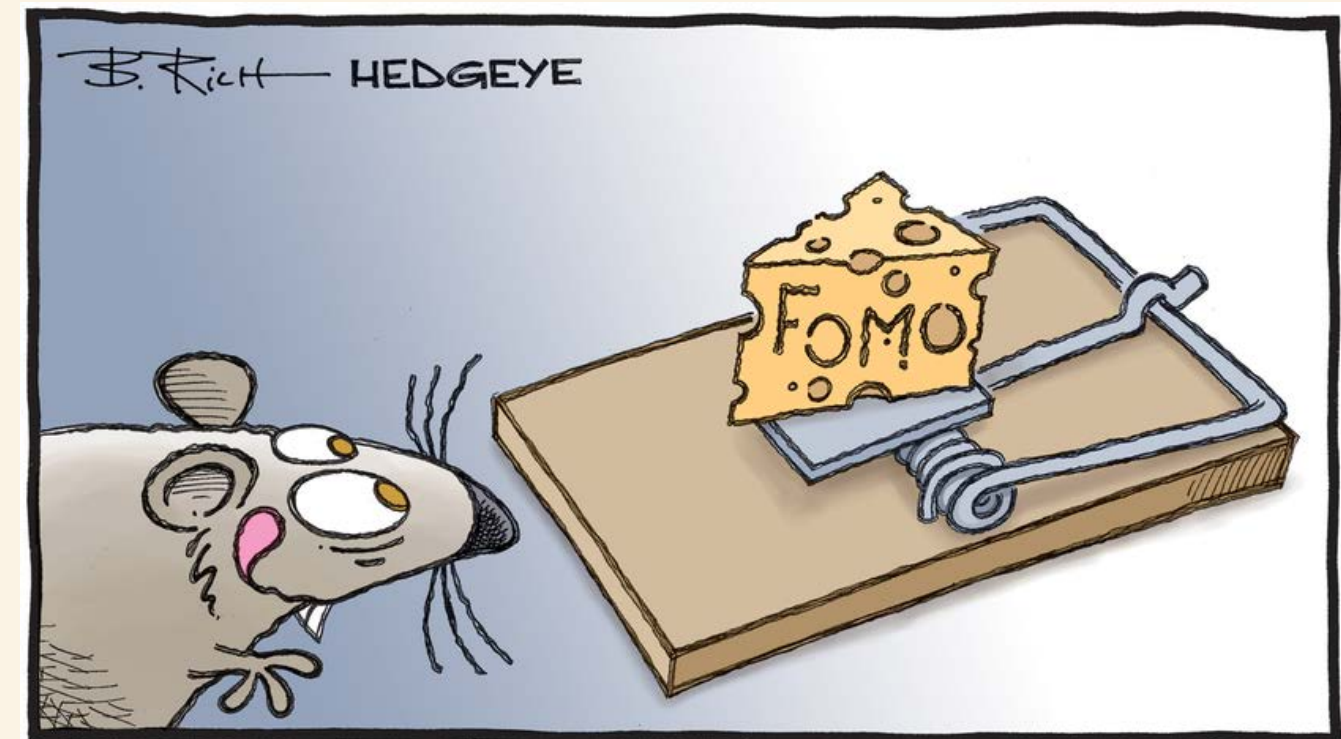
tantrums

refusals

extreme rigidity

ASSESSING ANXIETY TRIGGERS

- Look for patterns in the behavior
- Does it occur more frequently on certain days or at certain times?
- Is it around a certain event or series of events?
- Examples:
 - Eating
 - “Performance” activities
 - Open-ended questions
 - Physical movement
 - Arrival/dismissal
 - Academics
 - Playground



CREATING A PLAN



1. How important is this activity/behavior for life in general?
 2. How much of the day is impacted if the trigger is minimized?
 3. How specific is the anxiety trigger?
- If you decide that the trigger is one the child needs to be able to eventually handle, you can use a shaping process to begin exposure to that trigger
 - In shaping, you break down a large task into tiny components and offer a reward for each step of the ladder

Shaping

Start with small
steps

Build progressive
steps

Walking to
phys ed class
but not
entering

Sitting in class
for increasing
time (no
participation)

Participating
for increasing
time

Fully
participating
in entire class

Use reinforcers

Shaping child et inner responses

Raising hand
(not being
called on)

Responding
with rehearsed
response

Responding
with forced
choice

Responding to
open-ended
questions



SELECTIVE MUTISM

- Child will not speak in a specific setting despite being verbally fluent in other situations
- Can also demonstrate other “refusal” behaviors such as using the bathroom, eating, participating nonverbally, or following direct commands

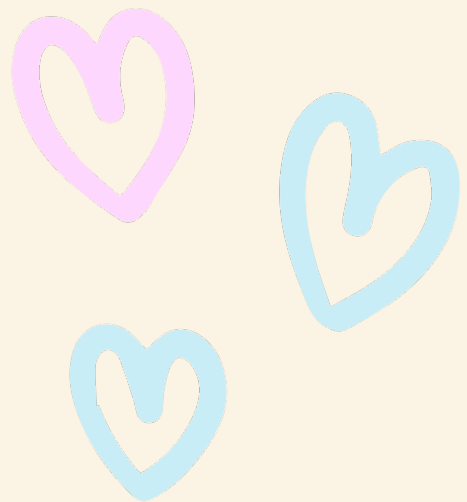
MYTHS ABOUT SELECTIVE MUTISM



- Selective mutism = social anxiety
- Selective mutism is not selective mutism
- Children with selective mutism are just shy
- They will speak "when they are ready"
- They will grow out of it

TREATMENT OF SELECTIVE MUTISM

- An important consideration is consulting with someone who is specifically trained in the evidence-based Parent Child Interaction therapy for SM
- Don't ask questions



TREATMENT OF SELECTIVE MUTISM


- Fade-ins with people the child speaks to fluently
- Child Directed Interactions (CDI)
- Targeted exposures
- Verbalization Directed Interaction (VDI)
- Wait time
- Rephrase questions



Fade-In process



Child Directed Interactions



Praise – labeled praise
Reflection
Imitate
Describe – behavior description
Enjoy

Example of Exchange in CDI

(Child draws a heart)



Behavior
description

Adult: You are drawing with a red crayon.

Child: It's a heart.

Adult: You're drawing a heart! Thank you for telling
me.



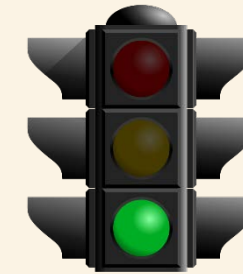
Reflection



Labeled praise

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

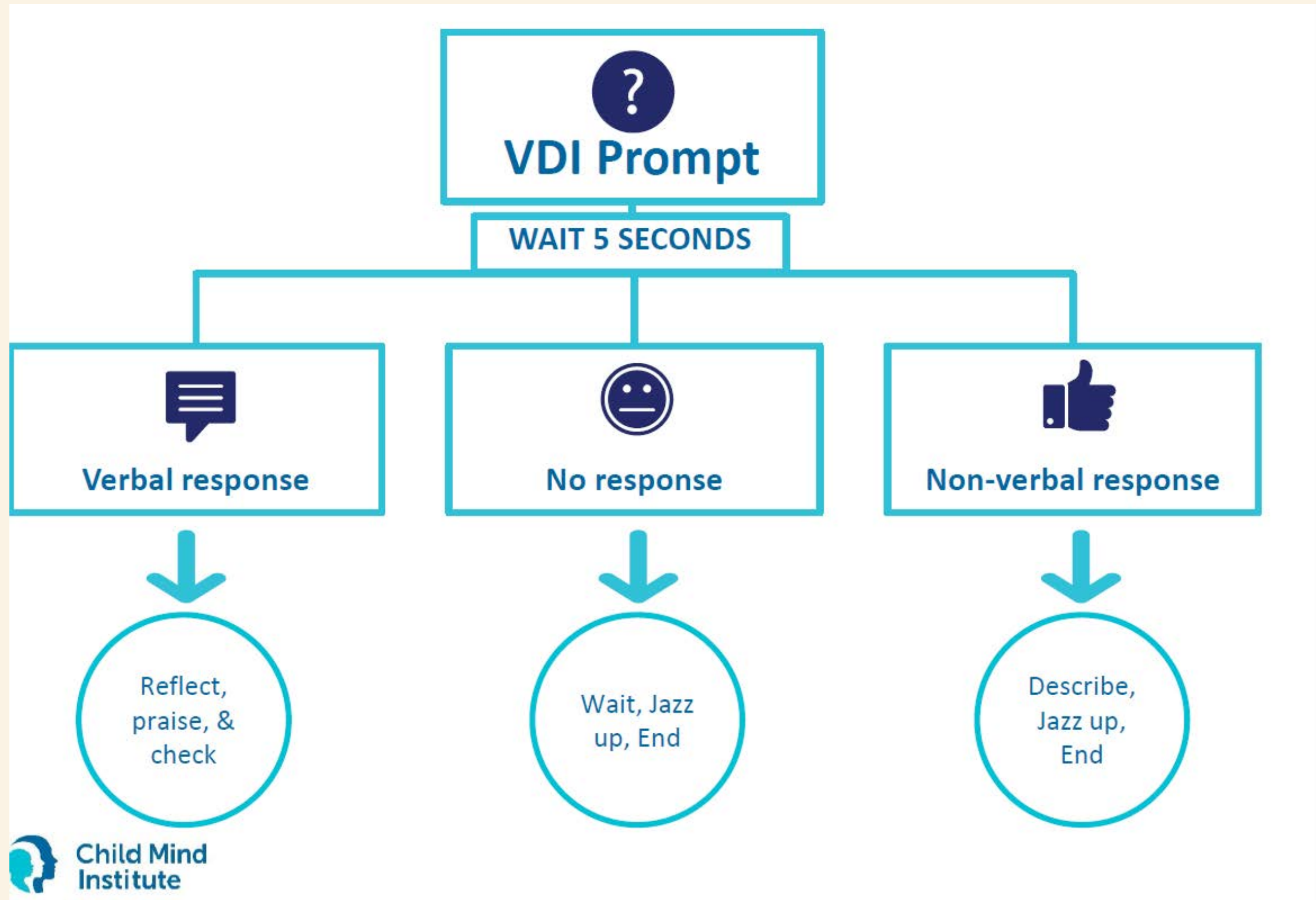
- Forced choice
 - Do you want red, blue, or something else?
- Open-ended
 - What color do you want?
- Direct command
 - Tell me what color you want.
- Yes/no
 - Do you want blue?



ELICITING LANGUAGE IN VDI

- Use a behavior chart
- Checks for each verbalization
- Watch your question types
- Use fade-in person
- Go ahead and tell your teacher your favorite color
- Teacher: tell mom how many M&Ms you want.

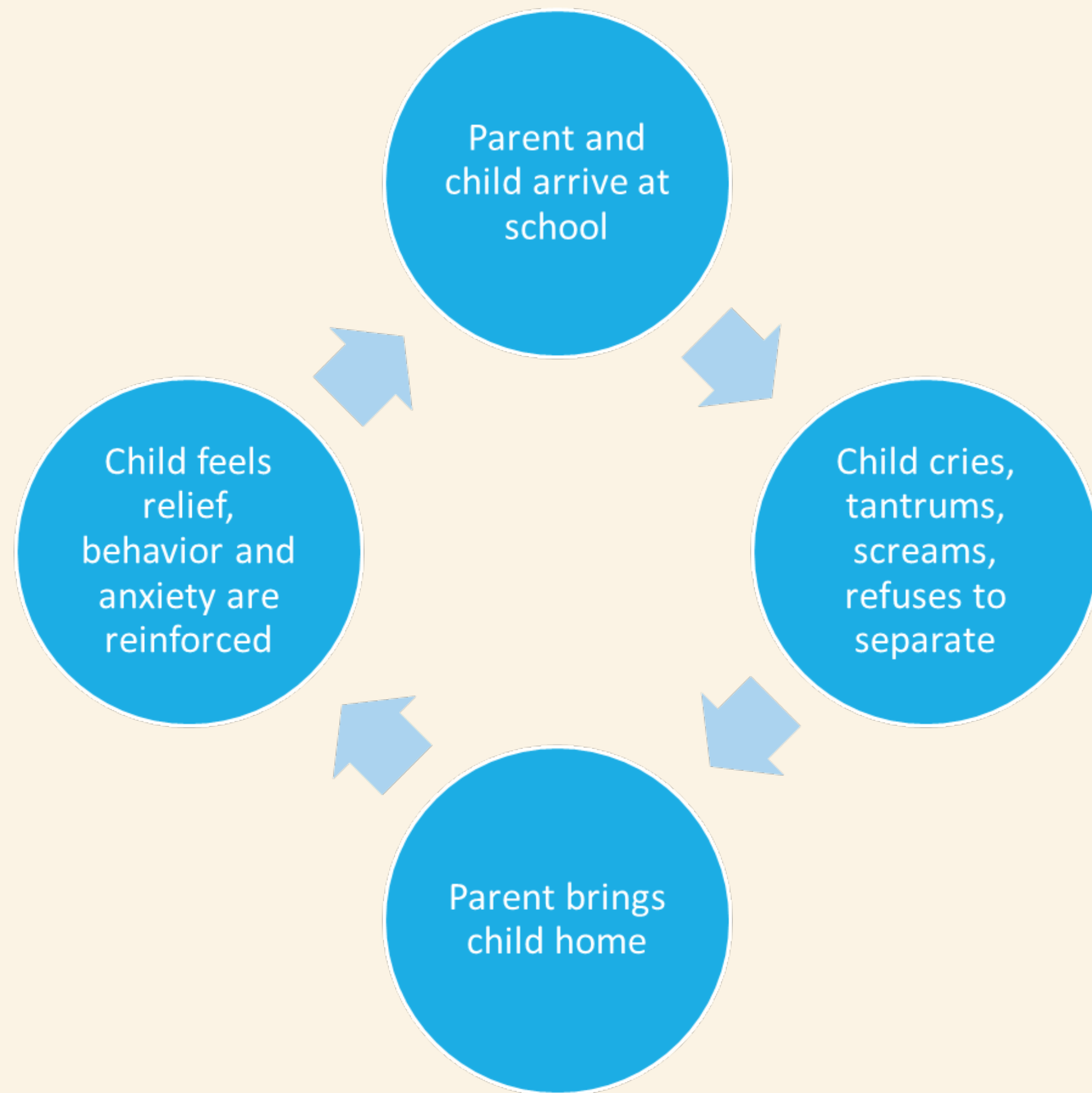
✓	✓	✓



SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIOR

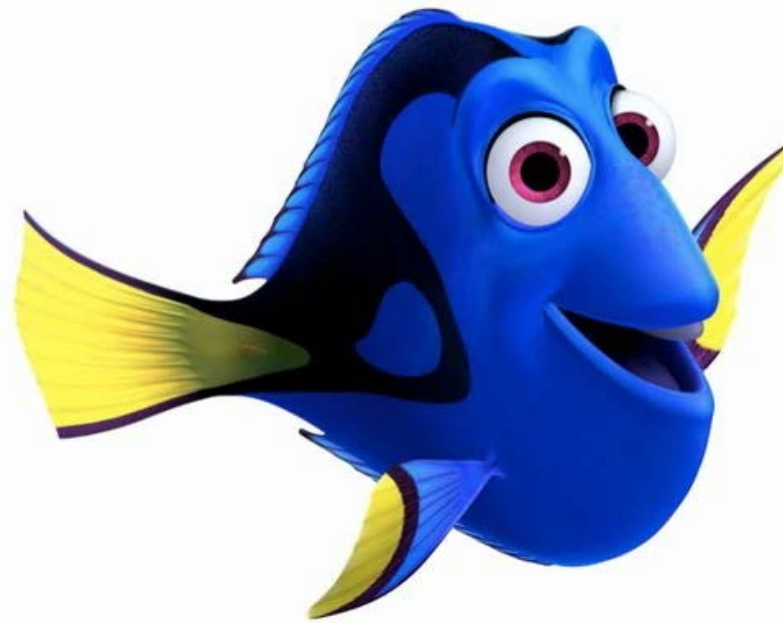
- Child has anxiety/distress about attending school or separating from parent
- Could present as excessive crying, tantrums, somatic symptoms, trouble sleeping the night before school
- Parents sometimes are unsure whether the child is actually sick



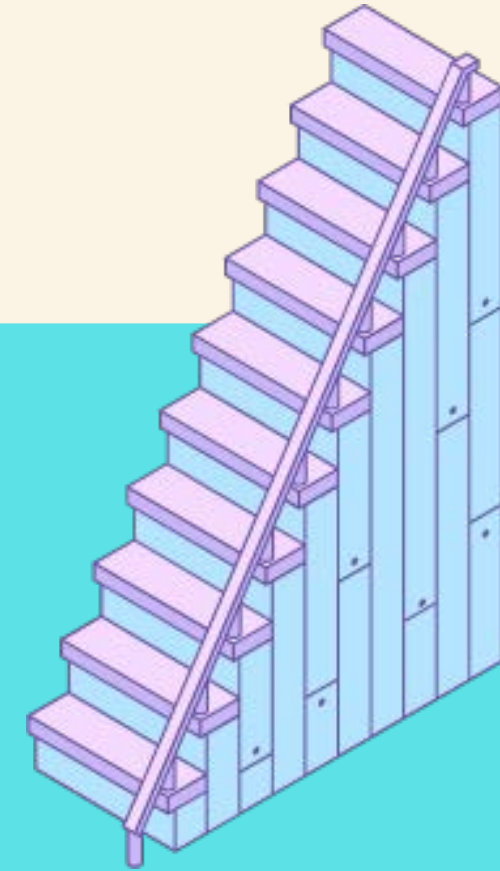




Take the bus



Just get through
it



Shaping system
starting with a
shorter day

LET'S COPE



COPIING SKILLS

1

Don't hing(it will pass)

2

breathing exercises

3

dist ract

4

take a Break

5

ask for help



COREGULATION



- Helping a child to regulate through your emotions/body language/verbal language
- Assess your readiness to assist
- "I am here with you"
 - Proximity/where you are in space
 - Tone/volume
 - Verbal messages
 - Calm, non-judgmental
 - Supportive stance- watch your arms
 - Breathe



