



Anxiety in Children and Youth

Psychology

Ottawa Catholic School Board



What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a common human experience
- We all feel anxious at various stages of our lives when faced with a difficult situation
- Anxiety affects one's whole being
- Anxiety is beneficial at times – fight-flight responses, competitions, exams

Typical Developmental Sequences of Anxiety

- Infancy: fear a loss of support, loud noises, stranger anxiety
- Toddler: separation anxiety, things bigger than themselves (e.g. dogs, monsters)





Typical Developmental Sequences of Anxiety (cont.)

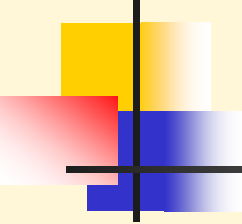
- Preschool: masks, new and unfamiliar situations
- Elementary School: real world dangers like fires, thunder or lightning, fears based on media events, supernatural beings

Typical Developmental Sequences of Anxiety (cont.)

- Middle School: social status, academic performance, death, physical appearance,
- Adolescence: safety, personal relationships, natural events, social scrutiny, political issues, the future and their success,

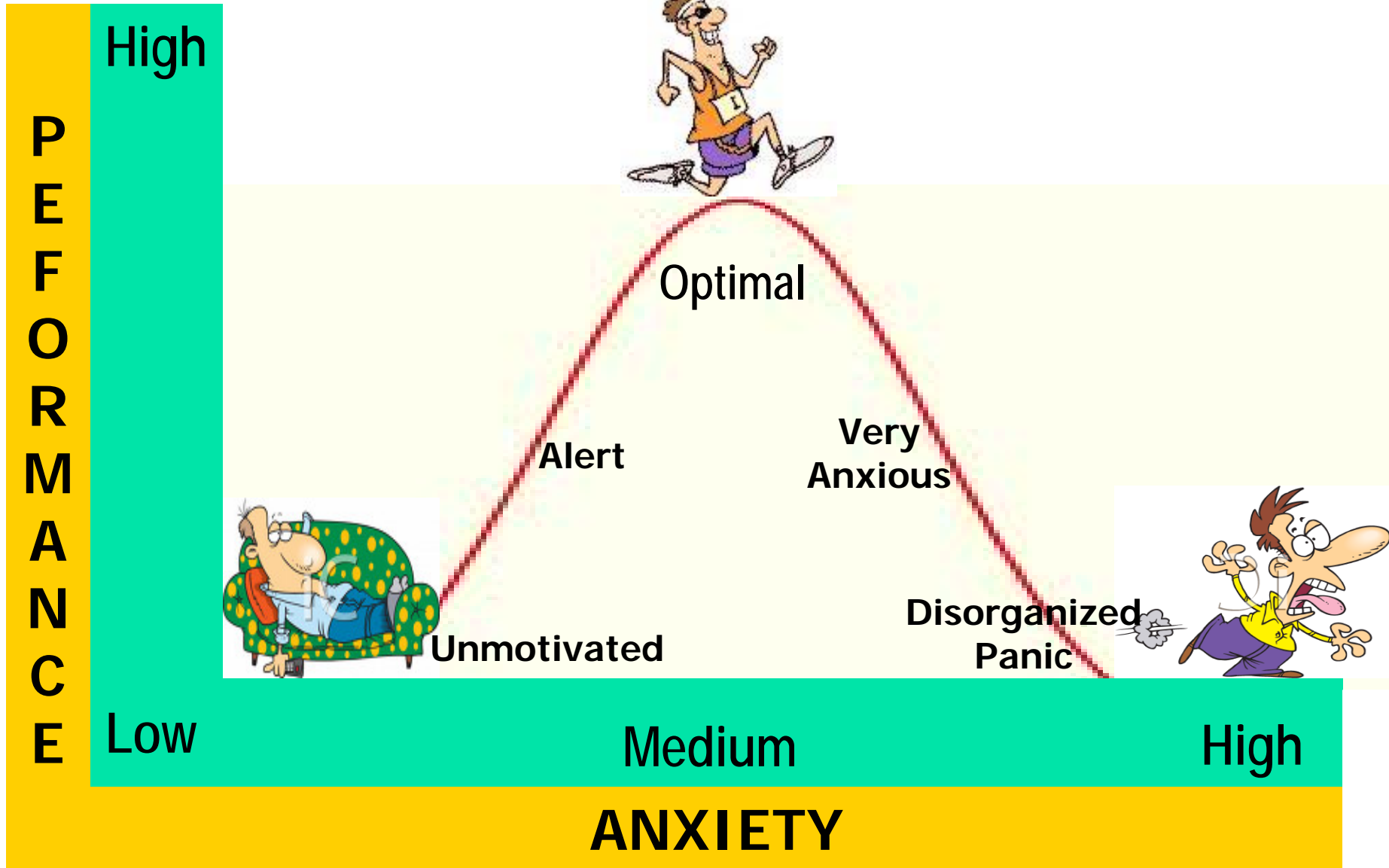


When Does Anxiety Become a Problem?



- When the symptoms are:
 - severe, unpleasant and out of proportion;
 - going on too long;
 - happening too often;
 - cause us to worry that there is something seriously wrong;
 - preventing us from enjoying normal life experiences.

Anxiety / Stress - Performance Connection





Why Do Some Children Cope and Others Don't?

- Nature

- Genetics and brain physiology
- High physiological arousal
- Temperament

Why do some children cope and others don't? (continued)

■ Nurture

- Traumatic life events (bereavement, divorce)
- Family interaction style, peer relationships
- Conditioning Paradigms
- Reinforcement patterns



How is Anxiety Perpetuated?

The anxiety cycle.

Cognitive
(thoughts)

Behaviour
(actions)

Physiological
(feelings)



Cognitive

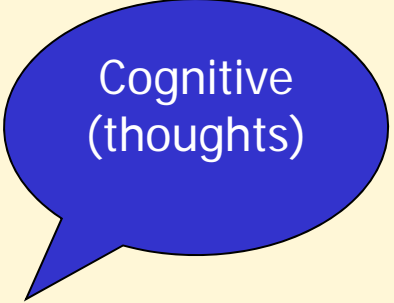


Cognitive
(thoughts)

- A bias to perceive threat/risk
- Underestimate ability to cope
- Worry about future events
- Perfectionist standards of performance
- All or none thinking
- Negative self talk
- Lack of problem solving skills



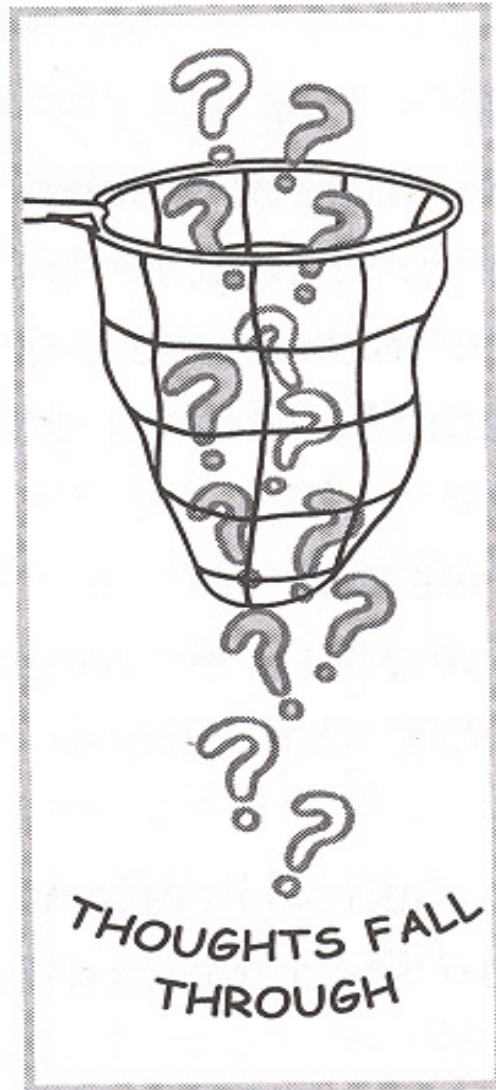
Thinking Traps!!



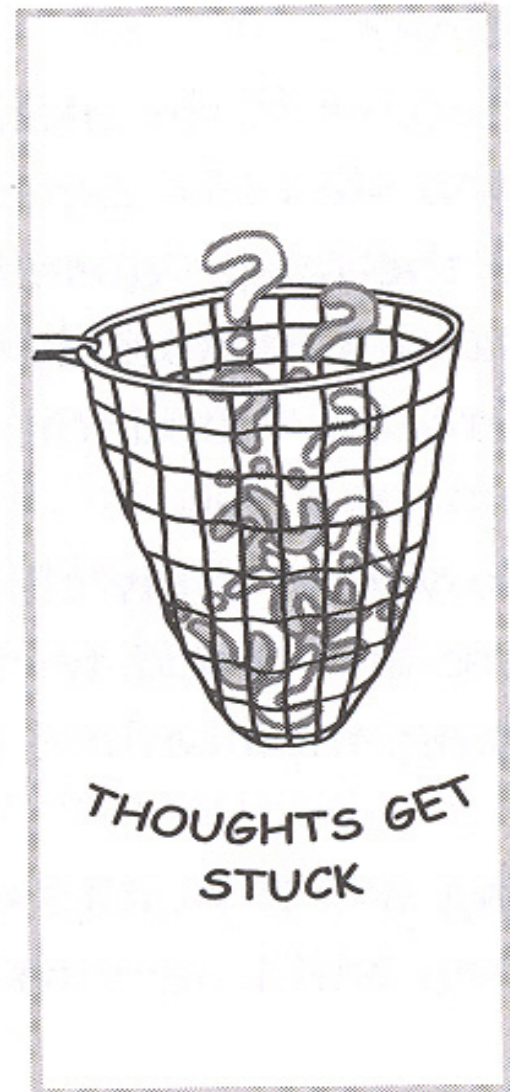
Cognitive
(thoughts)

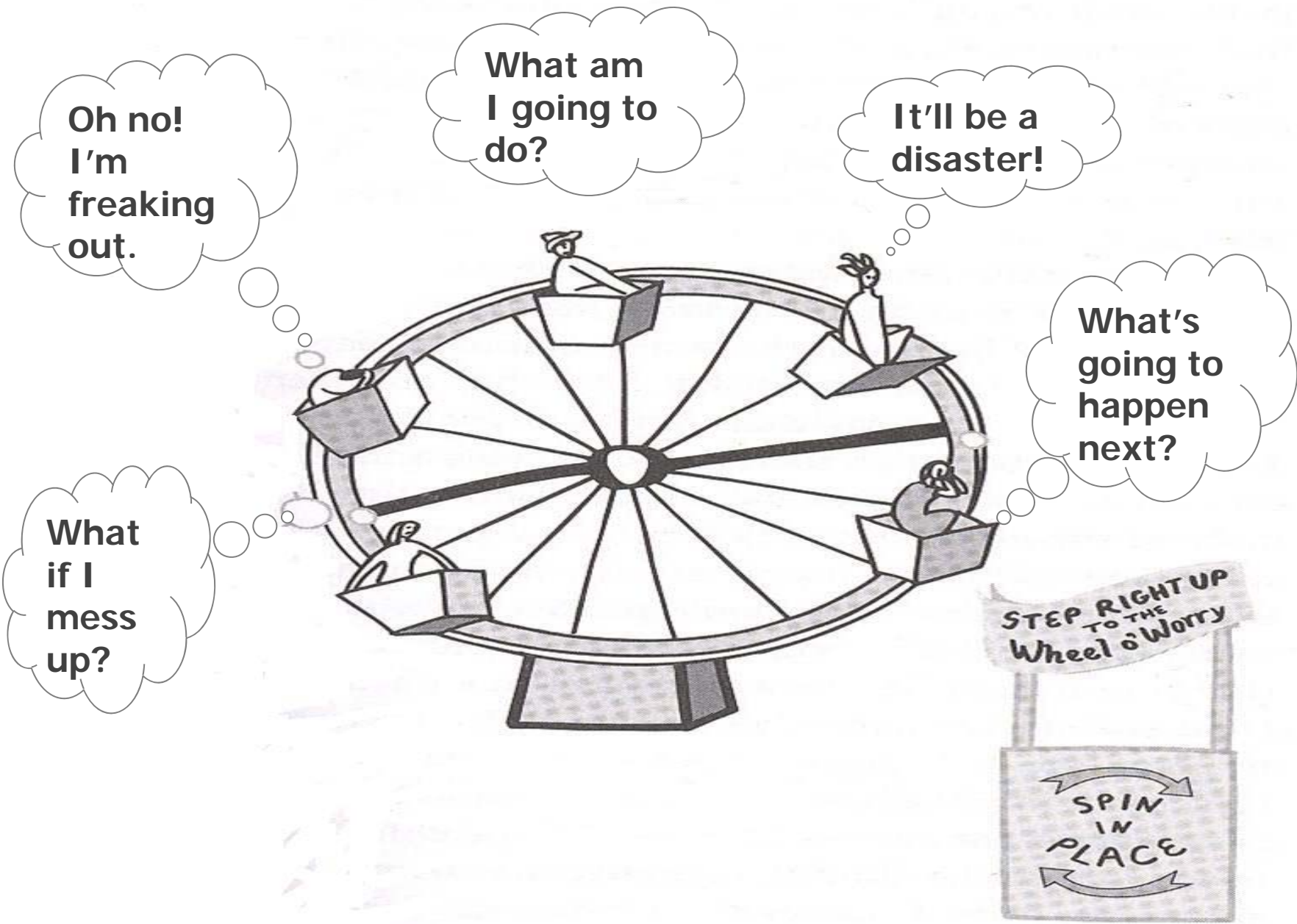
- Fortune telling
- Over-generalizing
- Mind-reading
- Labeling
- All or nothing thinking
- Over-estimating
- Catastrophizing
- Filtering
- Should statements

NON-ANXIOUS BRAIN



ANXIOUS BRAIN





Oh no!
I'm
freaking
out.

What am
I going to
do?

It'll be a
disaster!

What's
going to
happen
next?

What
if I
mess
up?

STEP RIGHT UP
TO THE
Wheel o'Worry

SPIN
IN
PLACE

Physiological Symptoms and Feelings



Physiological
(Feelings)

- Sweaty palms
- Increased heart rate
- Stomach churning or butterflies in stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle tension-trembling
- Feelings of worry, anxiety, stress, sadness, anger

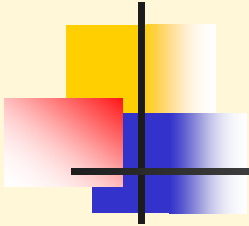


Behavior

Behaviour
(Actions)

- Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations
- Crying
- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal from others
- Repetitive behaviors
- Rigid behavior patterns
- Restlessness

Brain Train



Smart Track

Field Trip

- Field trips are fun.
- We get to miss school.
- The teacher knows what to do

Not nervous

Want to go

Excited



Thought

Feeling

Action

- What if I get lost?
- What if there's an accident?
- What if someone throws up on the bus?

Nervous?

Ask Mom if I can stay home!

Worry Track



Goals as Parents

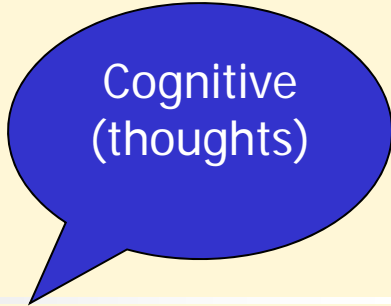
- To remember anxiety is a normal human emotion
- To keep it situational as opposed to chronic
- To keep the degree minimal rather than extreme.
- To build RESILIENCY



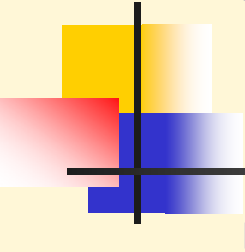
Building Resiliency

- Teach child that anxiety is normal and manageable
- Recognize and label feelings

Building Resiliency



Cognitive
(thoughts)



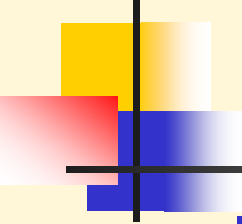
Cognitive

- Looking for the positive in the situation
- Challenge your thoughts
- Thought stopping
- Positive self-talk- I can
- Positive visualization
- Problem-solving
- Distraction

Building Resiliency



Physiological
(Feelings)



■ Physiological

- Relaxation exercises
- Meditation, yoga
- Visualization
- Breathing – deeply and slowly
- Drink cold water, wash face with cold water
- Personal favourite
- Physical exercise

Building Resiliency

Behaviour
(Actions)

■ Changing your behaviour

- Smile!
- Increase fun activities
- Do it!
- Make a coping plan, use small steps
- Determine when appropriate to approach versus avoid
- Modeling appropriate behaviour
- Teach self reward





Supportive Environment

- Reinforce spontaneity
- Give rewards or praise for handling “maybe” answers
- Identify “bravery” rewards for approaching behaviour rather than avoiding
- Identify positive role-models
- Permission and ability to learn from mistakes



Supportive Environment

- Don't dismiss feelings
- Don't over reassure
- Teach compensatory strategies
- Set realistic goals and gradually increase expectations when possible
- Help the child set personal goals
- Enhance their sense of mastery and control

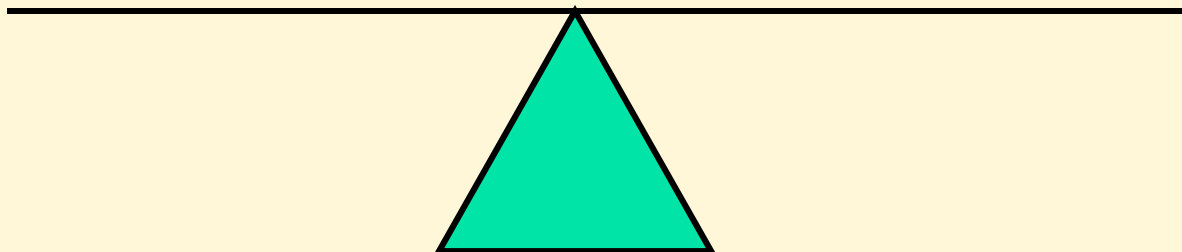


Balance

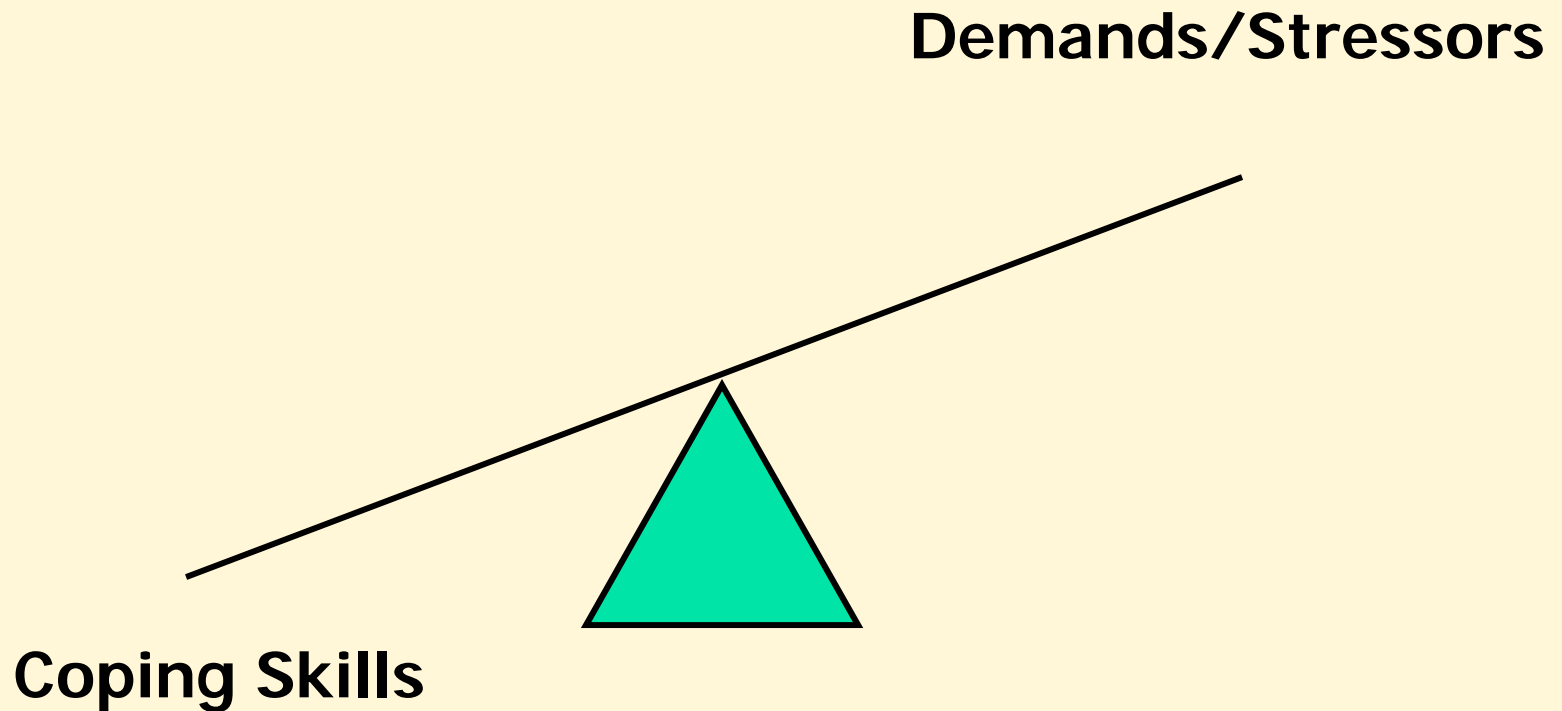
- Life is a balance between our coping abilities and the demands, expectations and conflicts we experience

Coping skills

Demands/Stressors

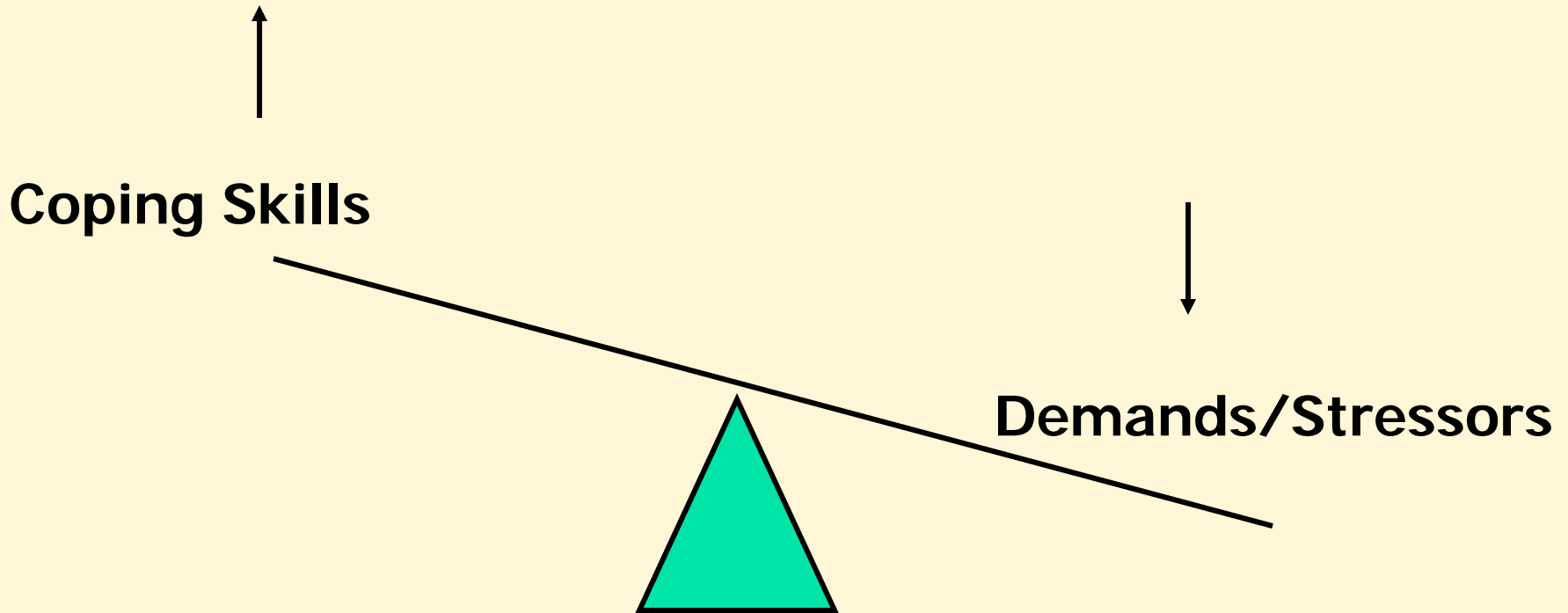


Problem if the demands are greater than our coping skills





Possible solutions





Websites / Books

www.anxietybc.ca

www.child-youth-health.net

www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php

www.drcheng.ca/mentalhealthinfo.htm

Freeing Your Child From Anxiety – Tamar
Chansky