



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Cwm Taf Morgannwg
University Health Board

Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation

Identifying, exploring and de-escalating the feeling of anger.

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Why are we here today?

- *Develop/Enhance Insight*
- *Validation and Reassurance*
- *Empowerment*
- *Practical Strategies*

A two-session workshop

Language to Describe Behaviour

Think about which word you use in your family...

Meltdown

'Kicking off'

Outburst

Tantrum

Red mist

Aggression

A Wobbly

Common Behaviours Driven by Apparent Anger

Kicking

Swearing Screaming Threats

Growling Shocking statements Shouting

Hitting

Biting

Withdrawal

Scratching



Hiding

Head banging

Silence

Spitting

Refusal

Squeezing

Running away

Curling in a ball

Climbing

Crying

Running around

Challenging Behaviours are Common

Being a family around a child who struggles with their feelings and behaviour can put a strain on everyone around them.

It is important that you **take care of your own well-being** so that you are in the best position to deal with challenging behaviours. Even as adults, our own tempers can be tested in difficult situations.



It can test anyone's patience to deal with meltdowns, particularly when there are siblings to consider too. One child's behaviour can affect their sibling/s and lead to conflict within the home.

All Emotions are Valid

We are not here to stop children feeling angry.

Anger is an important emotion that is natural and to be expected.

We should never discourage anger or associate anger with shame or being 'in trouble'.

What we **do** when we are angry is what we can be held accountable for.

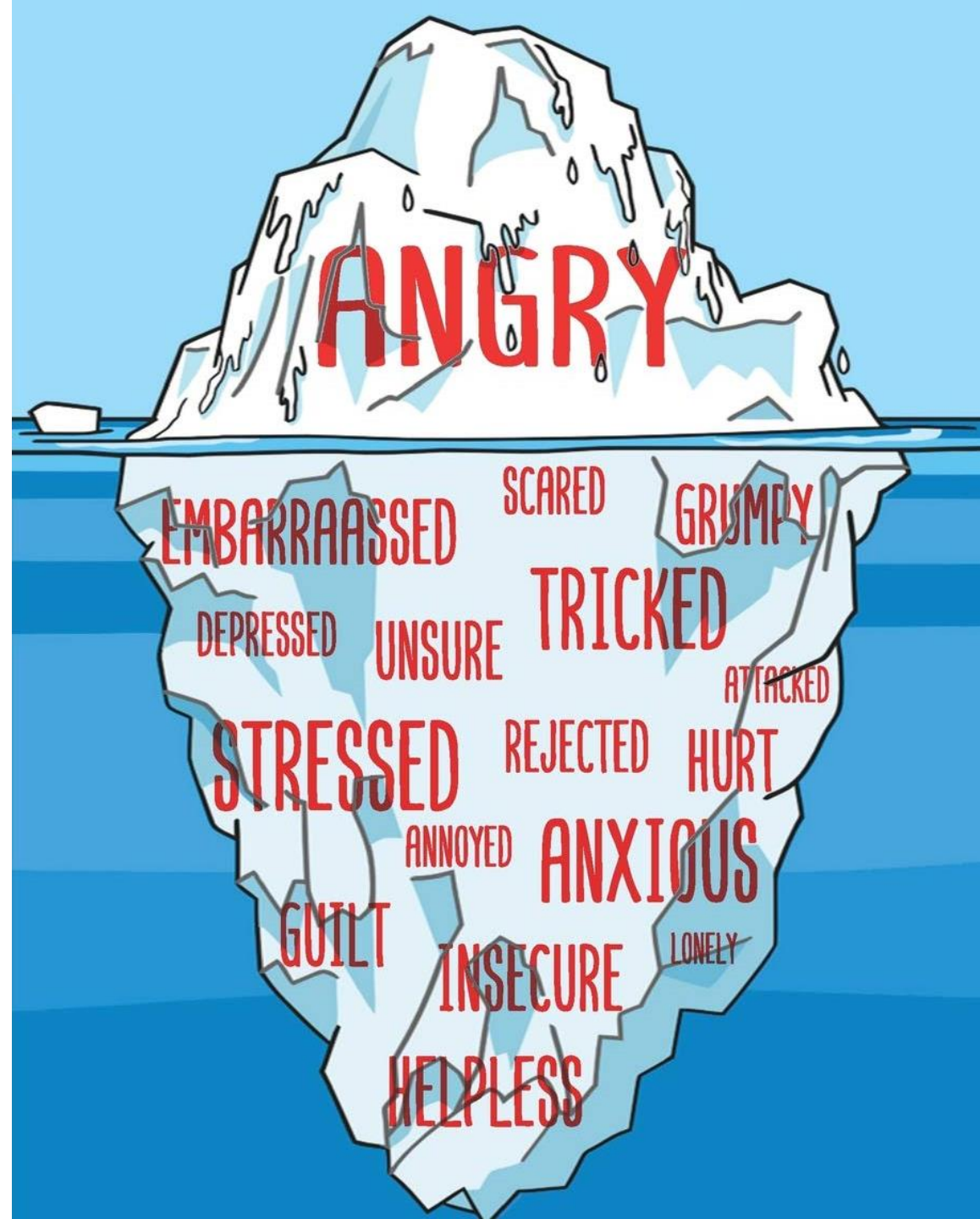


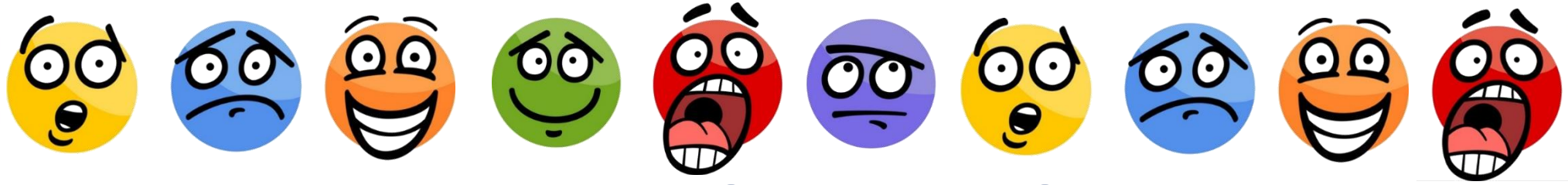
The Anger Iceberg

Anger is a strong emotion that leads to many outward behaviours.

It is so important, to support emotional awareness in children, that we **understand what emotion the child is specifically feeling** and not simply allow them to use the term 'anger' to cover lots of emotions.

Anger can 'mask' true feelings and lead to difficulty in resolving issues and expressing feelings effectively.



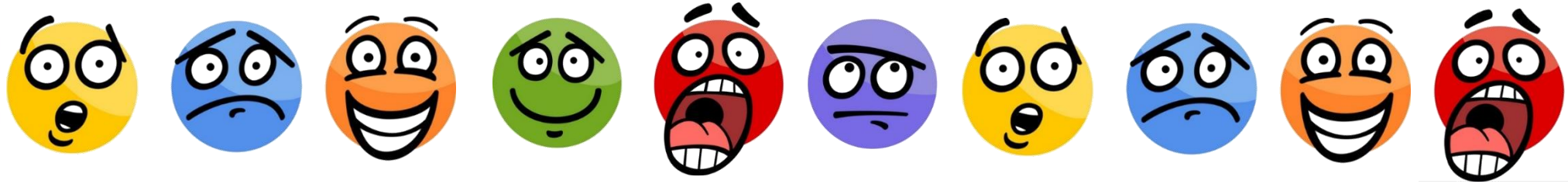


Emotional Regulation

The ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.

This may involve processes such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, focusing on reasons to remain calm or be happy and containing our emotions until a more appropriate time.





Emotional Regulation

Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.

A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.

Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, are very 'emotion driven', can be unpredictable and switch quickly between emotions.

Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance



Everyone has an emotional cup. When we wake up, most of our cups already have something in them.

Throughout the day, emotions, events, tasks and physical need fill our cup. For some children this happens slowly, for others seemingly 'simple' events can cause the cup to fill up quickly.

Eventually the cup will overflow if we do not do things to empty our cup along the way.

Hyper-arousal

High energy Anxiety Anger Overwhelm
Hypervigilance Flight/Fight Chaotic

Window of Tolerance

Grounded Flexible Open/Curious Present
Able to Emotionally Self-Regulate

Hypo-arousal

Shut Down Numb Depression Passive
Withdrawn Freeze Shame

Hormonal activity

Time

Emotional Regulation Window of Tolerance

What does this look like?

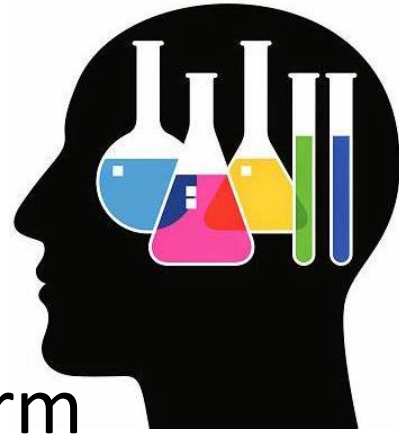
Children working within their brain's window of tolerance show good, age-appropriate self-control, are engaged, can problem solve, respond to instructions and appear calm.

When a child is above their window of tolerance they may appear agitated, conflict often arises, they may disengage, seem anxious, distressed or angry. They can no longer effectively process information.

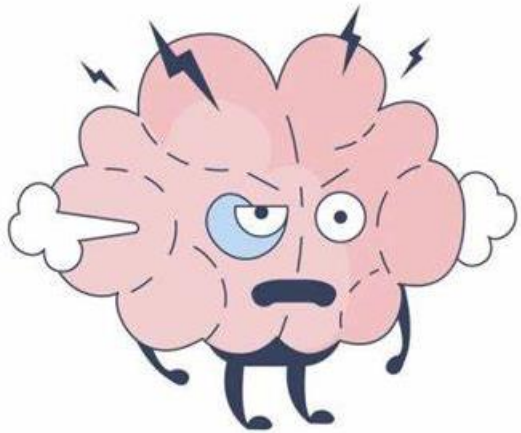
When a child is below their window of tolerance they may disengage, refuse to respond or move, seem sleepy, not respond verbally or seem to 'shut down'.

Vital Role of Chemistry

Anger is a reactive emotion that triggers lots of innate processes in our brain.



Adrenaline is released by the adrenal gland when any form of stress or anger is felt. This is an essential chemical that allows us to **react quickly without thinking processes**. This speeds up our heart rate to ready us to react and protect ourselves.



An 'adrenaline rush' results in a surge of strength, energy and motivation to 'fight'. Your child might **know how to behave**, but their rationality is battling against this very *physical response* in their bodies.

A Physical Response

Anger is very visceral and can be overwhelming and confusing for children.

Headaches

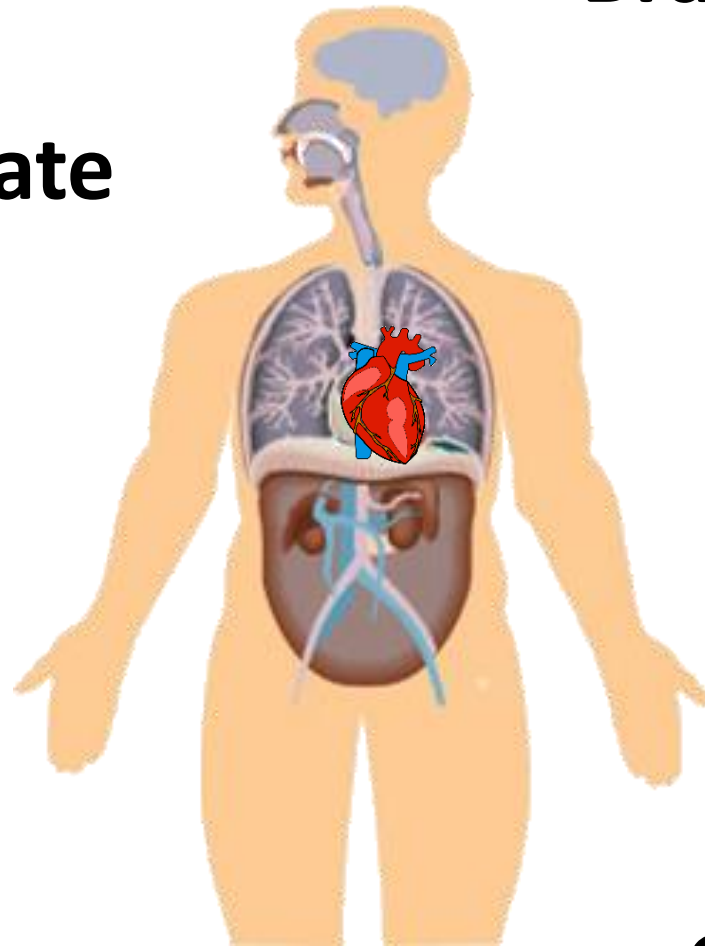
Increased heart rate

Tense muscles

Blurred vision

Fast breathing

Sweating



Brain fog

Tense muscles

Stomach ache

Sickness

Shaking

Redness

Cold hands

Fight, Flight or Freeze

This is an innate response that is triggered by acute stress.

The amygdala sends signals to the nervous system and triggers all of the physical responses that we have discussed.



The body will return to a state of rest within 20-30 minutes. The body cannot maintain this level of intense response for a significant period of time.

“Acute stress” can be being asked to share, bedtime, change, not having cake for breakfast...
It’s all about **perception**.

The Angry Brain



When a child is in such a heightened state of arousal, they have huge deficits in executive functioning.

They cannot rationalise, make good decisions, follow complex instructions or express themselves articulately. They may take risks with behaviour and forget rules and boundaries.

This is **not** an excuse for their behaviour, rather an insight into the processes within their brain and why they need help with emotional regulation until they develop this skill independently.

Anger as a Learned Behaviour

Everything I have mentioned so far, has been linked to **feelings** and **emotional regulation**. These are linked directly to emotional wellbeing.

It is possible however, for aggressive and disruptive behaviours to be a **learned behaviour**. This can either be as a result of witnessing it presented by adults or when they've previously shown genuine anger and it has resulted in a positive outcome.



When an outburst results in a child 'getting their own way' or the cause of the anger being removed, this aggressive behaviour is reinforced. This means it is **much more likely to occur again**.

Anger as a Learned Behaviour

Anger is one of the most widely recognised emotions. Studies have shown that even animals can detect anger in humans.

Children watch and absorb every interaction that we have – even it's not directly with them. Whether it's responding to someone in traffic, a T.V. programme, a cold caller or dropping your phone... children are watching and learning how to respond.



All Behaviour is Communication

Children's language skills are **often behind the development of their complex emotions**, therefore they do not have the capacity to truly **explain** how they are feeling.

Their language development may even affect how they **understand their own emotions**.

Without appropriate language skills, it is incredibly difficult to **share our thoughts and feelings with others**, to make lasting friendships, to give and receive information and to learn about the world in which we live.



What Can We Do?

Are we simply at the mercy of children in 'fight or flight?' who are fuelled by adrenaline and led by developing brains?!



NO!



NEXT WEEK

Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation **Session 2**

- Helping children to understand their feelings.
- Supporting the development of language around emotions.
- How to de-escalate 'meltdowns' in a positive way.
- Avoid the reinforcing cycle of behaviour.
- Devise a 'calm down' plan that works for you.



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Thank you for attending.